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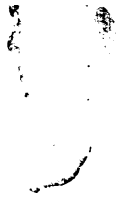

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THE TOUCH OF SORROW

A STUDY

by

c Mrs. A. Lyttelton. (Edith Hamlet) pseud.

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NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT & COMPANY
1896

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PART I.

" Tu dis vrai. Le bonheur amie est chose grave
Il veut des cœurs de bronze et lentement s'y grave.
Le plaisir l'effarouche en lui jetant des fleurs.
Son sourir est moins près du rire que des pleurs."

oc . 67

THE TOUCH OF SORROW.

CHAPTER I.

"Il n'y a guère de personnes qui dans le premier penchant de l'age ne fassent connôitre par où leur corps et leur esprit doivent defaillir."

A SUNSET in spring is sadder than any other sunset of the year—for when the last colors are fading from the sky, and the chill of night spreads over the fields, it almost seems as if the winter were begun again, and the promise of summer a deceit.

Stella felt this so strongly that she could not make up her mind to turn round and face the evening darkness, but kept her eyes fastened on the pale green reflection in the sky above her.

"I must go home," she said aloud, "but I swear I won't turn round till I see some stars."

She knew the way very well and she was in an open field, so she began slowly walking backward, stopping every now and then to look up again. It was beginning to turn rather cold.

"Oh dear! And Aunt Maisie is coming to tea!" she suddenly exclaimed. She had reached

the end of the field and was feeling with her hands for the gate. "I shan't move again," she said, "till I do see a star; it's only a waste of time."

Stella was neither tall nor short; a thin slight figure very straight, with an indescribable vigor about it, like a strong young shoot. Her face would be difficult to paint in words—a fair skin, with a faint flush in the cheeks, a small beautifully shaped mouth, of that melting red which can never be imitated, and dark blue eyes, not very large or very bright, but with a suggestion of smoldering fire under the dreaminess of their expression. Perhaps this would hardly have been noticed, were it not that her hair seemed to be aflame. "If you called it red, you were suddenly convinced it was golden, and if golden, that it was red" Aunt Maisie always said when she tried to explain its effect—and it rippled back from her forehead in dancing little waves.

After a few moments of anxious expectation, a star began to shine faintly overhead.

"Now I really will go," said Stella and with a great air of determination she turned her back to the sunset. She was rewarded, for the sky being darker in the east, many stars were showing in it, and there was no blackness to fear.

Stella's eyes lightened and she started to run—it was one of her peculiarities that she loved run-

ning—and the exercise brought fresh color to her cheeks. Her dark gray dress merged into the twilight, and when she pulled her hat off, her bright hair seemed almost like a will o' the wisp dancing down the steep hill.

Stella Morecombe's home was an old gray Elizabethan house in Surrey. It stood halfway down a great slope and looked over wide stretches of common and wood. There had once been a moat right round the place, but that was filled up now, and only one straight portion of it left to bound a flower garden with long grass walks and yew hedges.

Stella loved this place as she yet loved nothing else for the child had lived a curiously solitary life, undisturbed by any deep emotions. Her mother died when she was born, and she had been brought up entirely by her governess, who only succeeded in winning from her pupil an easy tolerance in the place of affection.

Mr. Morecombe also claimed little from his daughter. After the death of his wife, he shut himself up completely, and became each year more absolutely absorbed in his researches. He was a great naturalist, and on English birds was a recognized authority. He bred birds in his own aviary making his observations on successive generations, and his pursuits rarely took him far afield. The only time he appeared to notice

Stella was when her hair declared its color, for her mother's hair had been black, and his own locks were a dull heavy brown. Mr. Morecombe was much puzzled, and the problem had to remain unsolved: for he could not feed Stella on strange seeds, as he did his specimen birds, in order to see if her progeny would vary the type. He had therefore left his daughter alone; every day they met at breakfast and again at dinner, but Mr. Morecombe was never visible between these times. His hair had grown gray and his shoulders bent in the service of science—he had made many discoveries, had reared and buried many generations of birds, but as he used to say with a sigh, the ordinary span of a man's life is not long enough for a really thorough investigation of any subject. Stella's governess Fräulein Schmidt, was a good-humored, incapable Swiss woman: she adored her pupil, and was in a constant state of surprise at the child's quickness, always expressing her admiration with complete openness. If Lady Hambledon, who took great interest in her niece, drove over to the Court, Stella's exercises were all got out at once.

"Elle a écrit cela ce matin," Fräulein would say, her small brown eyes moistening with pride, in the tone in which she might have announced a miracle. Stella always listened, but she valued Fräulein's judgment so little that these praises

produced no elation, and she and her aunt used to laugh about them together afterward.

When Stella was fifteen, the poor governess suddenly realized that she herself was the pupil, and Stella the mistress; even in music, which was Fräulein's one gift, Stella had gone beyond her. When once she had completely grasped this fact, the conscientious woman, after many tears, requested an interview with Mr. Morecombe. With great volubility she explained to him that his daughter needed more advanced instructors, and that she felt it her duty to leave. At this poor Fräulein broke down and began mopping her eyes. Mr. Morecombe became very nervous, he turned over a lot of notes rapidly and looked at his watch.

"Really, Fräulein Schmidt," he said at last, "you must not think of leaving Stella—I—I—don't know what I should do about it. It doesn't matter about her education."

When Fräulein was excited, she spoke German, which Mr. Morecombe did not understand, so he nodded his head while Fräulein explained that Stella was *merkwürdig* and *talentvoll*, and then finishing in broken English, she asked if she might take her pupil up to London once a week for classes and masters.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Morecombe, "that will do very well; why didn't you suggest it at the begin-

ning! And now Fräulein Schmidt, I'm afraid I must get to work again. I hope everything is arranged."

Mr. Morecombe held out his hand and gave her one of his rare smiles, which always pleased people though they had but little intention in them and were chiefly used to conceal the absence of his mind.

Fräulein was overjoyed—her conscience was at rest, and she could stay with her child. Stella enjoyed the weekly trip to London, and practiced her scales with new vigor. Lady Hambledon was quite satisfied, and all went smoothly for the next three years.

But at the time this story opens Stella was eighteen, and Fräulein knew that before long she would be taken off to balls and parties, and married perhaps, and then. . . But these thoughts had to be banished. It was quite certain however that Stella was to "come out," and Lady Hambledon had driven over that very afternoon, determined to have an explanation with the "ant-eater," as she called her brother-in-law.

She was Stella's aunt, sister to her mother, and she considered her naturalist brother-in-law very inhuman, and resented what she called his snubby manner. These facts amply accounted for the nickname of ant-eater, for Lady Hambledon was one of those people who trust themselves to

speech on the slightest connection of idea or of sound, in the hope that the words may sometimes harbor a joke. She was a middle-aged woman of a comfortable size, but her round good-humored face rather belied the undoubted eagerness of her intelligence. She wore a fair curling fringe close down over her small gray eyes, and was always dressed in the last fashion. She did not exactly dislike her brother-in-law. "One can't dislike a bird's egg," she said, "but he hasn't any more feeling than one," only she was determined to make him do his duty by Stella. Stella was eighteen, she was very pretty, and she was something of an heiress. Lady Hambledon looked forward to her chaperonage with great interest.

But, as she explained to Mr. Morecombe, "I don't in the least want her to have a regular London season: she's much too young according to my ideas: No, no, let me have her at the Grange whenever I have friends with me."

"Well, well," said Mr. Morecombe, "You must do as you wish. As long as you don't expect me to stand in a doorway while Stella dances with foolish young men, I don't mind."

Lady Hambledon threw up her hands with a gesture of despair at the very notion.

"Gracious Heavens, Ralph, I can't think of

anything more incongruous, you'd spoil the whole thing."

Mr. Morecombe, contrary to all habit, allowed Lady Hambledon to pour him out a cup of tea. She had insisted upon his coming into the drawing room to speak to her, because, she said, he was so inattentive in his study. She was the only being in the world who was ever allowed to disturb his habits, but it was a privilege which she exercised very seldom, and only on great occasions. She had been rather nervous about this interview; his temper she knew was very inflammable, and it followed so soon on a still more important one, when she had begged that Stella might have a special allowance for the clothes which, as a grown-up young lady, it was now necessary for her to wear. He had been meek then, and acceded to her request with so little comment that she was afraid he might resent any further demands.

"But nothing is ever so bad as one imagines it," she said to herself contentedly, as she sipped her tea. "Why he's not a bit like a naturalist today: he's quite a Christian."

"Ralph," she exclaimed aloud, "has it ever struck you how extremely pretty Stella is?"

Mr. Morecombe looked up with the shadow of a smile in his eyes.

"Is she very pretty?" he asked.

At this moment there was a rushing sound in the house, a door banged, someone laughed, then there was another rush, and the door burst open.

Stella stood on the threshold transfixed with surprise—her father in the drawing room and drinking tea with Aunt Maisie!

She had put her hat on her head again to hide her tumbled hair, but it strayed from under it and framed her eager face. Mr. Morecombe looked up at her for a moment.

"Yes, yes!" he said in an absent way as he got up and shook hands with Lady Hambledon. "Stella will give you your tea now, so I will say good-by."

Lady Hambledon began to laugh gently to herself.

"Come here, you untidy little monkey," she said to Stella, "what have you been doing? Why are you so late?"

Stella had her arms round her aunt's neck in a moment. "Now you're not to be cross," she said, "But tell me why father was here, and what you've been talking about. Is anything going to happen?"

"You're coming to stay with me next Saturday fortnight, when I have got some people. That's all."

"That's all!" cried Stella. "Why it's heavenly! I shall wear all those smart clothes one after the

other. Oh! Aunt Maisie, do you think anyone will like me?"

Stella threw back her head and laughed.

"I don't care whether they do or not," she added, "as long as I enjoy myself. What fun it will be." She jumped up and went to the piano, and in a moment the room was filled with the sound of a joyous swinging valse. But there is some strange inherent pathos in every valse measure. It is often drowned in the pleasure of a ball: for perhaps when the body is dancing, the soul is happy and forgets. But the soul cannot play alone, and when the body is still, dance music saddens it. The room was growing dark and cold, and Stella stopped with a little shiver in the middle of a bar.

"I wish I hadn't begun," she said half petulantly. "One ought never to play when one's feet want to dance."

Lady Hambledon's carriage drove around, and Stella wrapped her up in a fur cloak, and tucked a rug round her, and stood on the steps to see her off.

"I don't think I *can* wait till Saturday fortnight," she said to herself as she went upstairs. "But I'll go and try on my new gown."

CHAPTER II.

"Thou hast no sorrow in thy song."

TO anyone of an imaginative temperament, a pleasure has three stages; the bright prophecy of its sunrise—its zenith—and the afterglow of its memory; and those natures which are eager for enjoyment will not forego a moment of any one of them. Stella as she went upstairs was seeing a vision of herself dressed in a new cotton gown which she had invented. It was pale lilac, and she wore a long white muslin fichu and a velvet ribbon round her waist. The difficult point to decide was whether her hat should match the dress or not—it was very important. "Clothes," she said to herself, "ought not to show thought, but should look as if they had come together by accident, or by a design of nature, like the pink tips of a daisy's petals." Her question was still unanswered when she reached the bedroom door, and the act of turning the handle and stepping into the dim room diverted her thoughts. Stella's bedroom was a delightful one, though curiously enough it had nothing specially characteristic of her about it.

A large square room with a low ceiling—an old Chinese paper on the walls, green, with strange bamboos and flowering trees stretching across it, a small wooden bed and chintz curtains on two windows which framed a beautiful view over the valley. Stella had little of that sentiment of association which plays so large a part in the imagination of some people; she knew no consecrated days, and her heart had never clung passionately to some little familiar trinket once worn by a friend. Although her mind was full of fancies, she never allowed it to rest upon the sad aspects of life, and seemed to turn away instinctively from anything which might possibly give her pain. She always, for instance, refused to talk about her mother, whom she, of course, could not remember, and when Lady Hambledon gave her one or two little bits of jewelry which had belonged to Mrs. Morecombe, Stella locked them away in a drawer and never once took them out again.

Fräulein Schmidt always said too, that she had behaved very oddly about the death of her tame canary. She had loved the little yellow bird for two or three years, it knew her, it fed out of her mouth, and sometimes when all the windows were shut she let it fly round and round her room. One morning when she went to the cage as usual, she found a little ball of feathers lying

in the sand at the bottom of the cage. Stella was utterly bewildered . . . she put her hand gently through the opening and lifted it out. There was something inexpressibly touching about the little soft warm corpse—the feathers are always warm—lying in the palm of her hand—small and helpless and insignificant and yet a being that had traversed the great distance. Stella stooped as if she were going to kiss the tiny creature, but with a shudder of dislike and fear, she suddenly put it down on the table and ran out of the room: nor would she enter it again, until every trace of the tragedy had been removed; the cage was sent up to the garret, the bags of seed were thrown away, and she never asked where her little friend was buried. No one dared to speak to her about it, and in a few hours all was apparently forgotten. For a long time Stella would turn away with impatience if she found herself involuntarily glancing up to where the cage used once to hang. She never kept another bird, it was almost as if she were afraid.

Since that time nothing had stirred her heart; the passion of her nature poured itself into her enjoyment of the life she led, and as yet she loved no one deeply. Fräulein Schmidt was her slave, her father a mystery, her aunt an amusement, and she had never come into close contact with anyone else.

Stella rang the bell for her maid—a middle-aged woman who had once been her nurse, and who watched her stages in growth with anxious mistrust. This last chapter of new clothes and vistas of new friends really horrified the faithful woman, and she would show no sympathy.

So the spare straight figure with brown eyes fixed on vacancy stood grimly in the doorway.

"What do you want, Miss Stella?" she said—Stella was a little frightened.

"Oh, never mind, Rose," she answered, "if you are busy. I only want a light, and I thought I might try on those new gowns—I am going to Lady Hambledon's in a fortnight."

"In a fortnight, miss?" repeated Rose in a tone of incredulous remonstrance, "you can't go in a fortnight."

"Why not?"

"I can't possibly finish your new skirts by then."

This was irritating, besides being untrue—Stella answered quickly.

"Very well, then I must go without them, Rose; but I'll try on the new gowns now."

Rose went off grumbling to herself, but she reappeared shortly with a white fluffy garment tied up in a sheet. Without saying anything she laid it on the bed and began lighting the candles.

Stella laughed. "Rose, Rose," she cried, "how

can you be so horrid?" and she put her arms round her nurse's stiff waist from the back and twirled her round.

"You ought to be glad when I am," went on Stella; "why I am enchanted at the very idea of being grown-up, and you ought to be longing to see how I shall look."

Rose had the tears in her eyes, but Stella would not see them—she would not put her cheek against the poor old nurse's cheek and say she would never dance away from her. She began quickly taking off her gown, talking on about the new clothes and the new life, while Rose went to the bed to fetch the evening dress. Her mood was still ruffled, and when she uncovered the gown and saw sleeves which to her outraged eyes were not sleeves at all, she turned round sharply.

"Why, Miss Stella, you're surely not going to wear a body like this?"

"What is the matter with it," asked Stella gayly, "no sleeves? Of course not, no one wears sleeves on a ball-gown!"

Rose sighed, but her heart had not been softened.

"Your arms are much too thin," she said with emphasis, "they ought to be covered up."

This denunciation was too much for Stella's sense of humor, though in truth she was a good deal disturbed by the remark. It rather spoilt

the anticipatory pleasure with which she examined herself in the glass—her lovely little neck and shoulders emerging from a cloud of white. The arms were a trifle thin, perhaps, thought Stella uneasily, but how pretty her figure was and her hair.

Rose went out of the room saying it was time for Miss Stella to get ready for dinner, and Stella, left for a moment to herself, peered into the glass, holding the candle up above her head. There was no doubt she looked lovely, and a thrill of expectation and pleasure ran through her. She made a sweeping courtesy to herself in the glass, and started, half with fear and half with annoyance, at being caught posturing, when Rose came back carrying some hot water.

CHAPTER III.

"Some flowers pause through long warm days,
Slowly their leaves unfold
But others greet the sun's first rays
With blossoms fresh and bold."

LADY HAMBLEDON'S house was a long, low modern building, white and covered with creepers. There was nothing special about the place in any way—a small very bright garden, a few pine trees, a pond and one distant hill; and yet the Grange enjoyed a certain amount of fame as a delightful house to stay in. It was quite close to the station, within an hour from London, and the easy manners of its hostess made a Saturday and Sunday there a great refreshment and pleasure. When Sir John was in England, Lady Hambledon did not ask so many people, for although he had friends, he had not the numbers of attached acquaintances who congregated round his wife's genial personality. Just now Sir John was in India, trying to establish a frontier in the north, his post in London being kept open for him. Lady Hambledon, who lived on the newspapers, was always besieging the War Office for news of the expedition. She was a devoted wife, and

really adored her husband as much when he was with her, as when he was away. The society of her friends was not a compensation so much as a distraction which helped her in some measure to forget her anxieties. This year the entry of Stella into what is called the world was an additional interest. Lady Hambledon therefore was in a contented frame of mind, as she sat in her drawing room on Saturday afternoon, the windows opening on to the lawn. Her tables were covered with photographs of all kinds—friends, celebrities, actresses; but on her writing table there were only two; one of Stella with her hair down her back, in a swing, and one of Sir John in uniform. She was wondering whether she had arranged everything for her guests, and thinking with some complacency that she had got a very good selection together for Stella's first venture. She felt confident that her niece would be appreciated at once, as she had none of the awkward shyness from which so many girls suffer.

"I must admit she does Ralph's neglect great credit," Lady Hambledon said, "perhaps leaving 'em alone is the best way after all to educate children." She had never had a child, but she was full of theories, and gave a great deal of advice to her friends who were mothers.

The time was creeping on, and Stella had not yet arrived. It was naughty of her, thought

Aunt Maisie, as she had promised to arrange some flowers for the dinner table. Stella had a special way with flowers, they seemed to obey her, and they never quarreled when she put them together.

But then Stella always was as unpunctual as . . . and Lady Hambledon paused for a comparison. Sometimes she tried the effect of using the first word which came into her head, and it often did very well.

It was a pity, because she would have liked to install her niece before the others arrived; this was the very first time she had been allowed to have her for more than an hour or two, and then she could have given her some advice—but it was no use, for here was the break with Sir Edgar Pierson, yes and his son Ronald, and Mrs. Grantham—but where was Mr. Bagehot?—why he was the crown of the little party.

Lady Hambledon was really very much alarmed, though her fears did not spoil her greeting, and not until she had successfully provided tea under the big cedar for her friends, did she turn to Mrs. Grantham, and ask anxiously,

"What's happened to your wicked brother? he was to have come by this train."

Mrs. Grantham looked up quickly. She had a striking face of noble outline. Her dark gray eyes were rather small, but they gained impor-

tance from slightly projecting eyebrows. Her mouth was ugly in shape, with a look of determination confirmed by her chin, and her nose was a little too long. But it was her forehead, wide and intellectual with the dark straight hair parted over it, which made some people call her handsome. She had been allowed two years of complete happiness with her husband, who had then been killed—or rather had given his life to save others in a mining accident—and since that time she had tried for ten years to cultivate patience. She was rich, and she lived in London working at all kinds of philanthropic schemes, and only allowing herself now and then a few diversions with her friends. She was by nature swift, gusty, and passionate, but she had learnt self-control, and her spirit rested in the presence of Christ.

Her expression now as she looked at Lady Hambledon's fat good-humored face betrayed a furtive amusement.

"I'm afraid I haven't the remotest idea where Martin is, I didn't even know he was coming here."

"Oh dear, oh dear, I hope he is!" cried poor Lady Hambledon. "What shall we do without him?"

"Did he leave himself any kind of a loophole in his letter?" asked Mrs. Grantham in a voice of inquiry.

"No, no!" cried Lady Hambledon. "On the contrary, he said he had a half-engagement elsewhere which he would get out of."

"That's very ominous," said Mrs. Grantham laughing. "Very—you don't know Martin's methods as I do," and then seeing Lady Hambledon was really annoyed, "It's sure to be all right though, Maisie, for he likes coming to you, and he generally does what he likes."

At this moment Stella appeared at the open drawing-room window. She was looking radiant in the very lilac cotton of her dreams, her face shaded by a large black hat.

She hesitated shyly for a moment as she saw that the people had come—she did not quite know whether to go forward or not.

Mrs. Grantham touched Lady Hambledon's arm.

"There is a beautiful creature who wants to speak to you."

Lady Hambledon looked round quickly.

"Stella!" she cried, and then turning to her guests, "My niece—Stella Morecombe," she explained, "who is just out."

Stella came across the lawn, and the timidity in her face gave it an added grace.

"Stella," said Lady Hambledon, "you must shake hands with Mrs. Grantham—one of my best friends; and here are Sir Edgar Pierson and his son Mr. Ronald."

Stella greeted all three very shyly. Sir Edgar and Ronald both bowed. Mrs. Grantham smiled at her. Sir Edgar was a thin spare figure, with a certain air of distinction. He had been born in a West Indian colony, but ran away from home when he was only sixteen, and found himself in middle life a widower with a son to educate, and a large inherited fortune. His face was extraordinarily narrow, and his eyes very close together, but their keen sharp expression could not hide a lurking kindliness. For ten years now he had lived in London, and had it not been for the presence of his son Ronald, would have passed for a much younger man.

Ronald, who was of medium height with straight light hair, blue eyes, and a small mustache, was something of an artist; he collected brocades and gems and even pictures. He played the piano and was kind to singers. Everybody liked him, and although some despised his effeminate manners, there were a few who recognized a strong heart under all his culture.

He was greatly surprised by Stella's beauty; surprised and almost hurt that he should never have heard of her before. Ronald Pierson made a point of knowing everybody and everything of any distinction—it was his *métier*. He called all the writers and musicians of the day by their

Christian names; he could laugh over the peculiarities of the last lion, and he had always read a review of the book which was under discussion. This appraising instinct led him at once to understand the importance of a new star on the social horizon—"a girl with that face must be more than beautiful," he said to himself. "I must investigate her."

Stella sat down beside Mrs. Grantham; she was annoyed with herself for feeling shy and awkward. Mrs. Grantham turned toward her with a welcoming look.

"I have so often heard of you, from Maisie," she said in her low quiet voice—"she feels as if you were her daughter."

Stella's eyes smiled.

"Isn't it a pity she hasn't got one?" she asked. "I'm afraid I'm not much good to her—only a trouble. This is the first time I've ever stayed with her," she went on with frank confidence.

"Is it?" said Mrs. Grantham surprised. "I thought you saw a good deal of each other."

"My home is only five miles off," answered Stella, "and my father has never let me go away before. This is my coming-out party," she looked round her with such evident pleasure, and her little proprietary air touched and amused the older woman. She felt a wave of

tenderness sweep over her for this young ardent creature, and she put out her hand with a caressing gesture.

"I'm afraid you may think some of us rather old and dull," sighed Mrs. Grantham.

Stella did not quite know what to say, and then she remembered that Mrs. Grantham was Martin Bagehot's sister, about whose handsome face and winning manners, her aunt had told her.

"Hasn't your brother come?" she asked with unconscious *naïveté*.

"Ah!" thought Mrs. Grantham to herself, "I know what Maisie wants," and she smiled.

Before she could answer Stella, Ronald Pierson had intervened, and there was a general movement. The older people went into the house, and Ronald and Stella were left walking up and down. He began talking to her about the last picture bought by the National Gallery, how beautiful it was, and how expensive. Stella was somewhat absent: she had not seen it. The sun was sinking, and everything seemed rather tired; the birds were all quiet, except for a few rooks cawing their evening prayers; there was a slight chill in the air, and Stella was thinking what a curious mystery the hour held—the earth seemed to be having strange half-conscious dreams, such as she often had in the transition from the waking world to that of sleep.

At this moment the iron gate in the wall, which screened the garden from the drive up to the house, shut with a clang. She looked up and saw coming toward her out of the colored sky—at least so it seemed to Stella—a man tall and young, with his brown curls just roused into gold by the last rays of the sun. His hat was in his hand, and his attitude was slightly theatrical, but his eyes were conscious of it, and they were lit by a keen half-mocking expression.

Stella stopped still with surprise, and her heart beat faster.

"Hullo, Martin, old boy," cried Ronald, "there has been great distress about you, we thought you weren't coming."

Stella was overcome with shyness—she felt she could not stay in the garden, could not speak to those dancing blue eyes, so without a word she turned and ran quickly into the house.

"Who on earth is that?" asked Martin.

CHAPTER IV.

" Little Ellie in her smile,
Chooseth . . . 'I will have a lover,
Riding on a steed of steeds!
He shall have me without guile
And to *him* I will discover
That Swan's Nest among the reeds.'"

THE next day being Sunday and brilliantly fine, Lady Hambledon found somewhat to her surprise that every one of her guests intended going to church. As a rule her London friends were too tired or too enchanted with the green to move from her garden, and she very often—when Sir John was abroad—consented to stay with them. This morning the reasons which determined the piety of the different members of the party were various. Mrs. Grantham went because she was a fervent churchwoman and found real strength and guidance; Stella went because she loved the cool of the church, the murmured prayer, the beautiful lesson. Then Martin Bagehot went from old habit and a sense that the future owner of a country place was bound to support the Establishment. This morning also he had heard Stella say at break-

fast that she meant to go, and the impression of his sudden vision of her the evening before was still haunting his imagination. It had not been disturbed by any acquaintance, for he only sat opposite to her at dinner, and afterward when he promised himself a talk, Sir Edgar was quicker and monopolized Stella the whole evening.

"I congratulate you on your most charming niece," Sir Edgar had said with a touch of emotion in his voice when he bade Lady Hambledon good-night.

It is therefore quite obvious why *he* went to church.

As for Ronald, he always liked to see a building which was new to him. It gave him pleasure to criticise the music, to penetrate the humors of the parson, and during the service to fit the stately texts to modern instances. He was also much interested in Stella. His conversation with her at dinner the night before had been full of surprises—there was no doubt she was very unusual.

So the company wandered across the fields to the low white church, quite hidden by some famous yew trees planted there when the first stone was laid, but which had long ago overshadowed their humble neighbor. The rooks had built in tall elms just beyond, and kept up a continual chattering all through the morning hours.

As they passed under the lych-gate, Martin smiled at Stella. His smile was peculiar. There was an indescribable nuance of challenge about it—a smile not of sympathy or even pleasure, but a summons to arms. It had a way also of lingering in his eyes as if it were mocking the whole situation.

"I know what you are smiling at," she said. "You are wondering why you go to church, when you'd much rather stay outside here."

"Well, that's partly it," laughed Martin, "but I think I had an instinct too that you would sympathize with me."

"No, I love going to church," she said, "but I get bored sometimes, and then. . ."

Further conversation was impossible, the last words floated back with the sun out of the cool damp church. The walls were whitewashed, there was an old wooden gallery where the choir stood, and some worm-eaten pews with high backs. An elusive fusty smell pervaded the chilly atmosphere. The congregation was very sparse—there was the doctor and his irreproachable wife, the vicarage servants, a few farm hands, and the squire who lived in the big red house, half-asleep already in his family chapel.

Lady Hambledon could not bear to be shut in, so she had an early Victorian pew with comfortable red moreen cushions and stools, and

a good view of the altar and all the intervening heads.

Stella found herself between Martin and Sir Edgar; her little interchange with the younger man had excited her and she felt impatient. She longed to go on talking, and found it quite impossible to listen to the lessons read in a droning tone by the village carpenter. He had a peculiar whistle in his voice, as the air went through his teeth, and his intonation moved backward and forward like a saw.

Stella longed to whisper this discovery to Martin, but she felt it would take too long—then she looked at Sir Edgar and found he was looking at her.

The service dragged on, it was time to stand up and sing, and this was worst of all; Ronald Pierson's face was puckered with agony.

The church at Leyton was very different, there everything ministered to Stella's artistic taste—the beautiful windows, the lovely carved screen, and the music which was an accompaniment both to her prayers and to the dreams which mingled with them. But here it was all too ugly, and Stella could not think of God. . . What was Aunt Maisie whispering about the squire—that he had a baby in a bottle—what could it be? The clergyman—a very old man—was beginning to climb up the pulpit steps, when suddenly

Stella felt she could bear this no longer. A bee began to buzz about her ears; the boughs of one of the yew trees kept tapping against the big ugly window, and it seemed to say "Come out, come out." So did the rooks which she could still hear. Martin Bagehot was at the end of the pew, she could not go without passing him. He was resting his head on his hand with an air of resignation.

"I'm going to wait in the churchyard," said Stella, and she laid her hand for a moment on his arm to attract his attention before she passed by him. Martin picked up his stick and his hat and followed her. He was conscious that the whole congregation and the clergyman were looking at them, and he tried to put into his back an expression of anxiety and commiseration. He hoped everyone would think that Stella was ill; but Stella's step was buoyant and her head thrown back.

When she got outside she did not stop to see if Martin were following, but turned toward the low wall which divided the churchyard from the green fields beyond. In the far distance some hills showed misty and blue against the horizon; there was a wonderful sense of peace and light blessing the hour.

Stella seated herself on the wall with a sigh of relief.

"Wasn't it horrid?" she said. "I should have cried if it had gone on any longer."

Martin looked at her with an amused expression—but this was habitual to him. He was always determined to find life amusing, and he would spare no pains to make it so. If people bored him, he played practical jokes upon them; if others who did not bore him, were grave or in a humor different from his own, he teased them until they made food for his laughter. But this was all done with such good grace and good humor that no one ever resented his domination, and most hearts danced to his piping. Stella was very entertaining, it was hardly necessary to tease her.

"Do you often cry?" he asked.

"No," said Stella, "I never cry if I can help it."

"Because of your complexion?" asked Martin in a bantering tone, leaning up against the wall beside her.

But Stella would not laugh; the serious mood which she could not attain to in church, invaded her here, and she let her eyes rest on the distance, looking almost as if she might cry now.

"You mustn't be afraid," said Martin suddenly with quick sympathy. "There's a great deal of crying in the world, but there's a great deal of laughing too, and you have everything to make you happy."

Stella was surprised, he seemed to have expressed something which she had never put into words herself.

"Ah, that's just it," she answered. "Look how happy I am now, and yet I hunger and hunger for more. Nothing would ever satisfy me."

Her tone was so vehement that Martin was half startled, but her mood changed instantly. "I'm just like a child who cries for the moon," she said, looking up at his face with a smile. "You would laugh if you knew how many things I want."

"Tell me," he said and there was a tender note in his voice—"I should like to hear about everything—please tell me."

Stella drew a long breath.

"Well," she said, "it's much easier to dream about than to talk about, but I want everything in the world to be mine. I want to be very beautiful, and to sing, and to understand what the wind says, like Shelley, and never to be afraid. And then when my life seemed quite full, I should like someone to love me."

"Ah!" said Martin. "And what is he to be like?"

"That doesn't matter," answered Stella, looking up and smiling again. "I cannot imagine him at all, but we must be absolutely happy together.

I want him to do everything with me, and teach me everything—I mean someone who can bring the stars down for me," she added in a lower voice and then stopped to look at Martin and see if he were not laughing at her.

"You want a poet, my dear child," he said half sadly.

"No, no!" she cried. "I want no one—I would rather have nothing than be disappointed."

There was a long pause, filled full of thoughts, but neither noticed it. Martin's eyes wandered past the sheep and on to the fields spreading themselves in the sun. He was stirred by her words, though he hardly knew why; perhaps the pathos of these desires touched him—she was so ardent for enjoyment and happiness, prepared for floods of joy, and had never yet felt the cold touch of sorrow. Martin was as ardent for pleasure as she, but he was older and had seen bright hopes sometimes fade into gray despair, and the pangs of death had more than once overshadowed his life.

A longing to smooth the way for Stella possessed him. "Why," he thought, "should not one soul at least meet nothing but happiness."

Stella was still in a dream. The gleaming fields lay before her, like her imaginary future; a lark was singing high up in the blue sky.

Martin seated himself beside her; he had an insane longing to kiss her little white hand lying on the wall.

The organ in the church began to peal, and the congregation straggled out of the porch.

"Here they are!" said Stella, half relieved.

Martin had caught sight of a blue speedwell growing in a cleft in the old wall, he picked it carefully and gave it to Stella.

"I can't pluck the stars for you," he said, "but will you take this little flower instead?"

Stella blushed, but she pinned the delicate blossom carefully into her gown.

Lady Hambledon standing in the path, caught sight of her and hurried forward.

"My dear child," she said, "I hope you did not feel ill?"

"Miss Morecombe was rather overcome," said Martin gravely. "She was afraid."

Stella glanced at him with a smile.

"It was just naughtiness, Aunt Maisie," she said. "I was so dreadfully bored."

They all moved forward, and Sir Edgar took Stella's cloak on his arm.

"My dear young lady," he said, "I wish very much I had the courage to be naughty too."

"Do you?" cried Stella. "You shouldn't, you don't know what troubles I get myself into."

"I don't believe it," answered Sir Edgar

gallantly, "you could never get into trouble: no one could ever scold you."

Stella looked at him with an innocent expression.

"Why?" she asked, and now there was a challenge in her glance.

Sir Edgar was quite unembarrassed.

"You surely know," he said, smiling, "that you are far too," and he paused, "lovely and delightful for anyone to be angry with you."

Stella flushed slightly: she could not help being pleased.

"How kind you are to me!" she cried. "I wonder if you really mean any of it."

Sir Edgar was just going to answer, when a drunken tramp suddenly turned the corner beyond them. He broke in on the radiant scene, the hedges gay with white blossom, the pale laughing blue of the sky, like a sudden hideous discord in a beautiful harmony. His dirty clothes were ragged and torn, he had no hat except his matted hair, and his face was red and swollen. He lurched up against Sir Edgar, singing in a foolish voice, and Sir Edgar gave him a vigorous push which sent him sprawling on to the hedge, where he stayed contentedly.

Martin Bagehot, who was behind, clapped his hands at this feat—Mrs. Grantham was visibly distressed. "Poor wretch, poor wretch," she said.

Stella was furious.

"How disgusting and horrible," she cried, turning away with a shudder. "How I *hate* him." And the rest of the way home she was almost silent.

CHAPTER V.

"When whispering strains do softly steal,
With creeping passion through the heart,
And when at every touch we feel
Our pulses beat and bear a part.
When threads can make
A heart-string quake,
Philosophy
Can scarce deny
The soul consists of harmony."

MARTIN BAGEHOT had never been in love with anyone; partly because he had passed nineteen safely, and had not yet reached the dangerous age of forty; partly because he was artist enough to be fastidious, and not enough to be reckless. Life was very full of interest and pleasure for him; he was rich, brilliant and attractive, and his enthusiasm was as easily lit as a match. His brains were nearly always hot over some new scheme, and so infectious was his vigor that he made others share his own belief in himself. He was greatly loved for his ready sympathy and energy in giving help, but chiefly for the irresponsible charm which lay about him.

As he sat in the cool, shaded drawing room after luncheon, he wondered what it was that made Stella different, and so delightfully different, from any other girl he knew. He hardly admired her beauty, it was rather too strange, he thought,—like a dress with too many colors in it. No! it was the sense of her vitality and her love of life which attracted him. "She is like a Greek nymph," he said to himself,—"very close to the earth and joyous with its joy. . ."

His musing was broken in upon by Lady Hambledon's full voice.

"We won't go out just yet," she said.

It is curious how the very people who are most careful not to interrupt speech, sometimes break ruthlessly in on thought.

"I think Stella must play to us," she went on. "Stella darling, I should like to hear the new Chopin you have been learning."

Stella came forward slowly, swinging her hat in her hand.

"I won't play," she said, "unless everyone wants it," then turning to Martin,

"Are you fond of music?"

"I love it almost better than anything in the world," said Martin, welcoming what might be a further revelation of Stella.

As if quite satisfied, she went at once to the piano. Lady Hambledon was mildly excited,

she felt almost sure that Stella's playing was good, and she had Fräulein Schmidt's word for it, but she was not musical herself, and would not trust her judgment. That was why she had chosen this informal hour for Stella's first performance. Stella herself was quite unconscious of all this; she was not nervous, and she enjoyed her own playing intensely.

Ronald Pierson was arrested by the very first notes. He was a fine judge of music. "There is a touch of genius in this," he pronounced to himself and looked round the room as if he could not bear to wait till she had finished, before he gave his judgment.

Stella had chosen to play one of the great Schumann Romances, full of strength and triumph, and she thundered out the chords, vibrating, herself, with the inspiriting sounds. To Martin it seemed that all the youth and hope of the world had at last found expression.

When she stopped there was silence for quite an appreciable time and then a confused round of astonished applause. Ronald Pierson clapped gently, looking into Stella's eyes as he did so. Mrs. Grantham came across the room to the piano; she felt years younger as she bent down and kissed Stella's face.

"Play something more," she said, "something quite different."

Stella thought for a moment, and then began an air of Rubinstein's which calls up to the imagination a moonlit glade and the song of the nightingales and the whispers of love, and this she played with a passion which she herself certainly did not understand.

Martin could hardly speak when she stopped—he stood up as if someone had called him.

. . . . . .

That evening Mrs. Grantham sat in front of her looking-glass thinking. She had let down her long dark hair which reached to her knees, and was slowly combing it out. She appeared to be watching herself intently in the glass, but in reality she was seeing through it darkly. Stella's music had woken the happy strains in her memory which she had not always the courage to hear, and she was living over again some of her most precious hours. She recalled the magic of her first love letter—remembering how she stuffed it under her pillow, and was kept awake all night by its whispers, how knowing it by heart was not enough, for she could not believe in its existence, until she felt the paper in her hands again and saw with her eyes the characters which her lover had traced. Then the next morning he had come; she could still feel the thrill of his presence. . .

Mrs. Grantham bent her head and covered her

eyes with her hand; she was not crying, she was praying and waiting for the sense of nearness to her dead husband which sometimes rewarded her. Could it be true, she wondered, that this same joy was being prepared for Martin on one side and Stella on the other; she had an instinct of what was coming, so strong that she found herself almost jealous. But this was only a passing gust of feeling, and she was soon absorbed in fancies about her brother's future.

A timid knock at the door interrupted her, and when she said "Come in," Stella turned the handle and stood on the threshold. She was still in her white evening gown.

"Aunt Maisie wants to know," she said shyly, "if you won't have your breakfast in bed, as you insist upon going up by the early train to-morrow."

"Come in," said Mrs. Grantham smiling. "Come and talk to me a little. I won't have breakfast in bed, because Martin is coming up at that time too, and it's quite a treat for me to have breakfast with him, and it's not so very early after all."

"I didn't know Mr. Bagehot was going so soon," said Stella, looking very much disappointed. "Are you great friends?" she went on. "Is he your favorite brother?"

"He is my only brother," said Grace, "and I

love him very much, but somehow I do not see much of him."

"Why?" asked Stella.

"My life is a very full and busy one, you see. Then he is always working hard at something or other too. And he goes to parties in the evening, and I don't, so we do not meet in that way."

"Are you tired of them?" asked Stella, drawing nearer.

Mrs. Grantham shook her head.

"It's not quite that," she said, "but I'm too old."

Stella looked indignant.

"That's not true," she said. "You are not old at all; why I think you are beautiful."

Mrs. Grantham could not help being pleased at this naïve outburst. She put out her hand.

"Do you like me a little, Stella?"

Stella's arms were around her in a moment. "I think I love you," she whispered, half suffocating her new friend by her fervor, "and I can't bear to hear you say you are old."

"Well, my child," said Mrs. Grantham, "I won't say I'm old if you don't like the word, but sad."

"Yes, of course," answered Stella nervously, "of course——" and then anxious to turn the talk off sorrowful things, she began asking a series of questions, many of them referring to

Martin. Mrs. Grantham answered them all and asked many in return, and heard how Stella longed for London, and how intensely she had enjoyed her first experience at the Grange. It was quite late before they parted, Stella radiant with the pride and pleasure of having made such a friend; Grace Grantham happy in the sense of a new interest and love coming into her life.

CHAPTER VI.

I

"In her cradle, my heart,
The soul lies asleep,
Ah when will she wake
To laugh and to weep?"

II

"She will not awake
Till one bends above
Her cradle, and stills
Its rocking with love."

THE next morning Stella was down before either the brother or the sister—her two new friends. She wandered out into the garden, picking roses for Mrs. Grantham and feeling her soul flooded with love and happiness.

"I think every one of them liked me," she said to herself. "What fun it all is!"

Mrs. Grantham came out on to the lawn, soberly dressed for London, which for her meant committees and meetings and hospitals. Behind her stood Martin, also in London clothes, but there was no business air about his figure.

"Dear old girl," he said, putting his arm round his sister's waist. "I wish you would take things

a little easier and stay down here this week. What do you think of her?" he continued, pointing to Stella who was coming toward them.

"Fascinating," was all Mrs. Grantham had time to say.

The last few moments before a parting are always feverishly uncomfortable. If people only had sufficient courage, they could cut them short; but it is an instinct in human nature to cling to the skirts of happiness. Stella who was longing to put some seal on her new friendship, and perhaps to gain a place in Martin's memory, found herself condemned to an aimless discussion of the time of the trains, the right sort of breakfast and so on. She saw her two friends drive away at last, with what was almost a pain at her heart; but Mrs. Grantham had at any rate promised to write to her, and here was Sir Edgar smiling and bowing.

"Do you always get up so early?" he asked, looking with admiration at the color in her cheeks.

"It all depends," said Stella. "Do you?"

Sir Edgar who was conscious of having hurried down when he heard her voice in the garden, wondered if there were any mischief in her question; but Stella looked quite innocent.

"Yes!" he answered quickly, "it's an old habit with me, but I don't know why I stick to

it, for it's difficult enough to get through the day anyway without making it longer."

"Oh!" cried Stella. "It's hardly ever long enough for me."

"That's because you are young, Miss Morecombe," he said. "I was like that at your age."

"But I'm always going to be the same," answered Stella quickly with a note of reproof in her voice. "I shall never be old," and she stopped, for she was just going to say "like you."

Sir Edgar understood—he felt vaguely annoyed that she should place such distinctions between them. After all was it true, he asked himself, that life was so dull? He wished he had not said it.

"When are you coming up to town, Miss Morecombe?" he asked in a different tone of voice.

"I'm not coming at all," said Stella ruefully.

"Not coming—not when the season is in full swing," ejaculated Sir Edgar with great surprise—"what is Lady Hambledon thinking of?" It seemed to him impossible that any girl who could have a London season should be made to forego it.

"It is not Aunt Maisie," explained Stella. "It's my father, he doesn't like me to be away. Besides Aunt Maisie has let her house. I don't mind much," continued Stella, wondering if she

was quite loyal to her father. "There's only one thing I do long for."

"Yes?" said Sir Edgar, "what is it?"

"I've never been to an opera, you know," Stella said, blushing a little, "and I can't tell you how much I want to." Sir Edgar did not answer for a moment; he was startled by the eager response which he felt rising within him. This child, craving for all the things which had long ago ceased to amuse him—how delightful and fresh, she was—how easily he could give her pleasure.

"I was wondering last night if I could persuade you and Lady Hambledon to come up and pay me a visit," said Sir Edgar quickly. This was not strictly true, but Sir Edgar felt Stella might fancy she had forced his hand. "I hesitated because I was not sure how I could offer you enough inducement; but if you will really come, we will choose the very best opera of the year, and you shall——"

"Oh!" interrupted Stella, clapping her hands. "Oh, how delicious it would be! Do you think Aunt Maisie will ever let me come?"

"You must leave it all to me," said Sir Edgar. "It will be the greatest possible pleasure to me to see you enjoy yourself."

She looked such a child as she stood before him, her eyes dancing with anticipation, that he

could hardly resist the impulse to take her face between his hands and kiss it.

His feeling was quite fatherly, he told himself, when he thought over the incident afterward.

When the two Piersons had driven away, and Stella was left with her aunt, she felt absurdly oppressed, and the prospect of returning that afternoon to Leyton and Fräulein and her father only made matters worse. She wandered about the garden, going over in her mind every conversation, and recalling the different stages of her new love for Mrs. Grantham. She remembered that at first she had hardly admired her at all, and wondered how this could have been. But even now it had to be admitted that she was not as beautiful a woman as her brother was a man. How splendid he looked that first evening when he came up the garden! She felt strangely restless and uneasy whenever she thought of Martin; at one moment she wished she had not talked such nonsense to him in the churchyard, at another she longed for him to come back and listen to some more.

Then the thought of Sir Edgar came like a smile into her thoughts. Would he forget his promises? How wonderfully kind he had been! He must have taken rather a fancy to her, she decided complacently.

Lady Hambledon joined Stella in the garden.

"I am delighted with you, my dear," she said. "I knew they would all like you, but I didn't know quite what a success you would be—they were each one of them enthusiastic. As for Grace she's quite silly. But I shall make you silly too if I go on."

Stella was too shy to tell her aunt about Sir Edgar's invitation; she felt it would sound as if she were boasting if she repeated his assurances.

And then Lady Hambledon turned to other things. She had a long letter in her hand from Sir John, portions of which she read aloud to Stella. She gave her all the part about the missionaries and the supplies, and the native chiefs, and she left out all the terms of endearment, and the expressions of his longing for home. "Um, um, um," she said, "that won't interest you—um, um." But it was just those parts that Stella most desired to hear. She hardly knew her Uncle John, but she wanted to hear how a husband wrote to his wife.

Stella when she said good-by to Lady Hambledon, repeated over and over again that she had never been so happy in her life, and begged her aunt to send for her soon.

"Promise, promise," she said eagerly, "that if you go to London you'll take me with you."

The drive home in the evening made Stella realize how much had happened to her in the last

two days. She contrasted her humor as she passed these same fields on Saturday, full of excited anticipation, with her present mood of depression and feverish desire for more. Her ears had been filled with the sound of other voices, and now she seemed to have no space for the songs of the birds—every moment had been full of interest and pleasure—she felt there was nothing now for her to do.

Fräulein was standing on the steps—her honest good-humored face beaming with pleasure at seeing her child again.

"Wie geht es, wie geht es?" she cried long before Stella had got out of the carriage.

Stella was irritated, she kissed Fräulein coldly, and said she was tired, and wondered if tea was ready. Fräulein, whose tact consisted in always following suit, asked no questions, but poured out the tea in silence. Presently however Stella wanted to talk.

"Fräulein," she cried. "Why don't you talk? Don't you want to hear who was there, or anything?"

Then Stella told her all about it, and described her triumphs till she felt quite ashamed herself of her governess' exclamations. It was the uncritical attitude of Fräulein's mind which made Stella tell her story secure of not being judged conceited. But after a little, Stella could not hear

herself admired so openly, without protest. She jumped up suddenly and said she must go and report to her father. Fräulein shrugged her shoulders as she left the room. "How altered she is!" she exclaimed to herself. "She will never be happy here again."

Mr. Morecombe put down his book at once when Stella came in—he had really missed her bright face and was genuinely pleased to see it again.

Stella kissed him softly. "I have enjoyed myself so much, father," she said.

"I'm very glad," said Mr. Morecombe. "Who was there?"

Stella eagerly began, but before she had got half through her list Mr. Morecombe was obviously far away.

CHAPTER VII.

"And hopes, and fears that kindle hope,
An undistinguishable throng."

BACK in her own home again, and following her usual routine, Stella found life somewhat dull and monotonous. Her former vague desires had suddenly taken shape, and she knew now that she wanted to get out into the world—to measure herself against her fellows—in one word to go to London. Ever since childhood she had accustomed herself to pray for the fulfillment of every passing wish, and it was natural enough now that her intercessions should take a very definite shape, and that, among other things, she should formulate her longing for the presence of her new friend Mrs. Grantham.

She found it almost impossible to speak of these desires to Fräulein,—they belonged to a new act in her drama, in which the governess had no rôle assigned her, and Stella was thrown back upon her own thoughts and imaginings. The main question round which her fancies revolved was whether Sir Edgar would remember his promise, and if he did, whether the little plot

would succeed. It meant everything for her—the opera—her new friendship—Martin, and the flattery of Sir Edgar's appreciation: for she was troubled with very few doubts.

The days went by, however, and nothing definite happened—moreover it rained so much that Stella was kept indoors, and she began to feel impatient and restless—almost sad. But before this feeling had time to take root, the weather changed, and with it Stella's mood. "If it would only always be fine!" she said to herself as she opened her window, "I shouldn't want people at all." The sunny day had that extra brilliance which a week of rain seems to give to the colors of the world, as if all the dust and dirt had been sponged off them.

She determined that she would go away for the whole day by herself, without anyone to interrupt her fancies for a moment. So telling Fräulein, who was quite used to these excursions, not to expect her till late, she ordered her horse to be saddled, and prepared a little packet of rolls for her luncheon. Mr. Morecombe had always allowed Stella to go riding about the country by herself—and in this way she knew many remote and sequestered spots, where she could lie hidden, and dream those daydreams of a colored future which sound so trivial and childish when put into words, but which at the time they are being made

seem to have an almost scientific value. Like all people who twist and twine their thoughts round their own future and fate, Stella was slightly superstitious; she believed however only in good omens, never in bad ones. There were certain places, certain hours, which exercised, so she imagined, a beneficent influence, and caused her prayers to be especially well attended to; and to-day she determined to make a pilgrimage to her favorite shrine. This was a little church perched on the very top of a heathery hill, called St. Martha's. There were no houses near it, no village to which it belonged, and only during the summer months was any service held there. Stella knew that it had been built by the Canterbury pilgrims, who had a quaint and delightful custom of thus crowning the tops of hills, and she had made it her Canterbury, and went there often to ask for what she wanted.

When she reached the foot of the hill, she put up her horse at a little farm belonging to her father. Stella had read that the nuns from the convent of St. Catherine's about three miles away, used to come once a year to pray in the church of St. Martha's, and leaving their mules at the bottom of the hill, climb up on foot. She stopped a moment to imagine their arrival—bells jingling, voices laughing and chattering—for this annual pilgrimage must have been quite a jaunt

for the quiet nuns. And then the long climb in their heavy gray skirts would have sobered them, and made them glad to sink on their knees in the cool church. There was a story connected with this pilgrimage of the nuns which always touched Stella inexpressibly, and her thoughts were busy with it as she clambered up. Tradition said that Stephen Langton, when only a peasant, loved and was loved by a beautiful girl called Alice. She was so beautiful however, that she attracted the attention of King John, and in order to escape from him, took refuge in the convent of St. Catherine's. It was conveyed to her that Stephen was dead, but this method of inducing her to leave the convent only made her take the holy vows. Stephen, believing also that she was dead, became a priest. After many years Alice was made Abbess of the convent, and Stephen, Archbishop of Canterbury, and it so happened that the Archbishop on one of his journeys, halted at St. Martha's and performed mass there. The Abbess and her nuns rode over, and so the two lovers, parted in youth, met in age at the altar rails. After the service, Stephen hastily unrobed himself and came back into the church, longing to take the hand of his friend once more. The Abbess was still kneeling by the altar rail; he went up to her and put his hand upon her shoulder, "My sister in Love as well as in Faith,"

he said, and then stooping down, perceived that she was dead. The joy of this meeting had been too strong for her tired heart.

Stella almost forgot her own desires as she reached the top and pushed open the oak door of the little church. It was bare enough inside, only a few worm-eaten pews, a small altar table under the painted window, and two or three ropes hanging down disconsolately from the little belfrey at the west end. But the building was very old, and the low Norman arches and pillars, with their roughly carved capitals, gave the church a curious and pathetic dignity.

Stella sank on her knees—the silence and loneliness of the hill-top church lifted her above her own longings—and her prayer was a kind of thanksgiving for all the splendor and joy of the world. Her religion was very real, although it was strangely connected in her mind, not with comfort or help, but with gladness and fulfilled desire. To her, Christ was not the Man of Sorrows acquainted with grief—he was the tender Man Who loved all children—Who went to the marriage feast, Who healed the sick. It was Christ of the Transfiguration, not Christ of the Crucifixion, to Whom she prayed.

When she came out again into the sunlight, and stood in the heathery churchyard, looking at the wonderful expanse of wooded hill and valley

before her, she realized that she had forgotten to pray for herself. Her longings seemed to have faded into insignificance, like a fire put out by the greater heat of the sun. There was scarcely a sound in the air, only a faint humming of insects and an occasional note from a bird. The noises in Stella's heart ceased also, and she felt a wonderful peace fall upon her. "This is where I should like to be buried," she said aloud. "Here one could never feel cabined, even in a grave." Then her thoughts went back to the legend of the two lovers—she could fancy the wonder and awe of that encounter, and to die of joy seemed to her the crown of Fate. But before dying, she decided rapidly that she would be married here; and on her way down hill, she planned in imagination every detail of the ceremony.

The sun was almost down when she reached home, Fräulein had had a long dull day, but she came into the hall to meet Stella, with a letter in her hand.

"From your aunt," she said.

Stella snatched at the letter with hardly a word of thanks, and holding up her habit, read it then and there in the hall. Her face flushed with pleasure.

"Fräulein, Fräulein," she cried. "Aunt Maisie wants to take me to London next week. I've been asked to go to the Opera—Oh! will father ever let me?"

"Mr. Morecombe seemed in very good spirits at luncheon to-day," answered Fräulein, trying to be sympathetic.

"I'll go and ask him at once," she cried. "One never can be sure when those birds won't take it upon themselves to disprove his theories."

"I don't know why Sir Edgar Pierson should take so much trouble about you," said Mr. Morecombe handing back Lady Hambledon's letter.

"I don't know either," answered Stella shyly, "except that he knows I have never heard an opera."

Her father looked at her with a gleam of surprised amusement in his eyes.

"Oh yes! You can go," he said.

Stella kissed him fervently, and hurried out of the room. She could scarcely contain her pleasure, and ran upstairs singing; "I always get what I want after going on a pilgrimage," she said laughing as she closed her door.

CHAPTER VIII.

" My soul in my depths doth sleep, and it is she
Who maketh answer, when they awaken me."

IT would be well if more of the great sights and sounds of life, instead of forcing themselves upon our consciousness when we are children, could be withheld until we had at least attained our full mental stature. Even in this small island it would be possible for many people to see the Atlantic for the first time only when their imagination was strong enough to conceive its immensity, and the virginity of their impression had not been impaired by a spade and bucket companionship with the great element. How wonderful an experience it would be if one might read certain things in the Bible with a fresh mind. The originality and the truth of Christ's sayings would have the force of a new revelation if we, as children, had not laboriously learnt them by heart. But it is difficult to be sure which is the more valuable possession,—a new burst of vision or a trained familiarity with the greatest thoughts. It cannot be denied, however, that the illusions of a theater might well be

kept for adolescence, and that it would be worth while to miss the pantomime if one's first introduction to the stage could be a fine play seen at—say—eighteen.

This was Stella's case. Mr. Morecombe had a morbid horror of London, and she had never slept a night there in her life.

Her mind danced with anticipation, and she felt she could hardly wait with any patience for the day to arrive when she and her aunt were to go to London. It had been arranged that they were to meet at the station early in the afternoon, and after a great deal of discussion Aunt Maisie agreed to sleep the night at Sir Edgar's house in Bruton Street. Lady Hambledon could hardly tell why, but she felt annoyed that her own small house was let.

"There is something a little absurd about Sir Edgar's attitude," she said; but by the time she got to Leyton Station, and saw Stella looking lovely under her big black hat, she had forgotten her slight irritation.

"Isn't it heavenly, Aunt Maisie," cried Stella as she jumped in, "oh! I am so excited about it."

Lady Hambledon smiled sympathetically.

"I wish it was cloudy," she said. "I hate going to London when it's hot."

"But you like going for an opera, don't you?" asked Stella a little wistfully.

Her aunt reassured her, and Stella spent the rest of the journey watching the trees and the fields fly past her. On former journeys she had often ridden, in imagination, on horseback beside the train and jumped every fence possible or impossible in her mad run; but to-day her mind was all bent on anticipation. When the train ran past the country and into the very midst of dirty squalid streets, she turned away. Aunt Maisie's lap was full of papers and books, smelling bottles and pencils—she never went the shortest journey without strongly fortifying herself against boredom, and she generally did nothing but look out of window. When Sir John was at home, he packed up her chattels for her, but now she was alone she had to struggle with them herself. Stella watched her for a moment without moving.

"We're just arriving," said Aunt Maisie in a slight tone of annoyance, "can't you help me, child?"

Stella gathered up all the things with one sweep, poured them into the bag, and shut it with a snap. Then she laughed and her mirth was so frank and infectious that Lady Hambleton was obliged to join in it.

As they drove through the streets Stella thought she had never seen so many beautiful people. They passed throngs of carriages holding lovely

beings dressed in pale colors, with dainty little bonnets perched on their heads. She felt suddenly shy, it was such a big well-dressed world, and what place had she in it?

Sir Edgar's house in Bruton Street was a model of good taste, not ridiculously large for two men, and not inconveniently small; full of beautiful and not merely valuable things, collected chiefly by Ronald.

Ronald had his own private sitting room lined with books, and a luxurious bed and dressing room. But as his father said with a note of pride—"he very seldom dines at home, and when he does we usually sit together."

Ronald was at home when they arrived, and took Stella all over the house, showing her the best pictures. To his great annoyance, he had an old engagement for the evening, which prevented him going to the opera, so that he was determined to make the best of what time was his.

Stella was very appreciative though quite ignorant; she thought David Cox was a portrait painter, and she mistook the cast of a Greek bronze for the original. But what did it matter, thought the young man; he had never met anyone so quick to understand his meanings and allusions, though he felt dimly that he did not always so readily understand hers. They were standing in front of a small picture by a great

modern artist. It represented a wild tempestuous night, the bare branches of the trees seemed to be tossing, and gray drifts of cloud were sweeping over the sky. Across the foreground of the desolate plain, passed a man on horseback, holding his long cloak over a child whose head was hidden. The father's face wore an expression of slight anxiety, mastered by reason, the child's face was hidden; and therein lay the genius of the picture, for as you looked at the ominous landscape some of the child's terror invaded you.

"I know what it means," said Stella shivering slightly, "that's what everyone always says to me—'It's nothing, it's nothing, don't be afraid!'" She was thinking of her talk with Martin.

"But what are you afraid of?" asked Ronald.

Stella looked straight into his eyes with an inscrutable expression. "Nothing," she said, with a half laugh, "nothing, of course—you say there is nothing, mein vater."

Ronald felt snubbed, he hardly knew why; he did not like being called "mein vater" either. He wondered if Stella would be sorry when she heard he could not come with her to the opera. He began explaining rather awkwardly how much rather he would stay with her.

"Where are you dining," asked Stella in perfect innocence, but Ronald got red. He knew that people sometimes said he was in love with

Lady Alice Ormiston, and he wondered if Stella knew this. The very idea made him furious. Stella had never heard any rumors of the kind and when he told her that Lady Alice was not an interesting though a beautiful woman, remained quite unmoved. But Ronald went on to say that his father had invited Martin Bagehot instead.

"Has he?" cried Stella turning round with a delighted look in her eyes. "Has he? What fun. I do like him so much."

She went upstairs to dress, feeling that her happiness was quite complete. Aunt Maisie had insisted that she must put on her very best gown, and let Dixon, Lady Hambledon's maid, do her hair. Aunt Maisie herself came in at the end to see how the dressing had succeeded; Stella was almost ready. Dixon had coiled her hair up high and stuck one of her mistress' long diamond pins in it.

'You ought never to wear anything but white," cried Aunt Maisie enthusiastically. "But good heavens, child your gown is much too high," and she vigorously tucked down the soft draperies in front so as to show more of Stella's white skin.

"It's quite as bad to have your gown too high as too low," she explained, 'one makes you look dowdy, and the other fast, and I don't know which is the worst."

They were a little late and Sir Edgar was at the bottom of the stairs waiting for them. He had inherited from his merchant father a methodical humor which contrasted strongly with the restlessness of his nature. He never missed an appointment, and he was rarely unpunctual; his was the organizer's instinct for punctuality. He had taken Stella's enjoyment as his chief object for this evening, and planned out every detail like a courier. It was part of his scheme that Stella should not miss a note of the overture. But it was equally important that dinner should not be hurried over. Sir Edgar very seldom used his box at the opera himself, he took it chiefly to give away; for he noticed that no other favor which he could offer roused so much gratitude. To-night, however, the double spectacle of the opera and of Stella's listening to it attracted him irresistibly.

"I was frightened this morning," he said, "for I heard a report that Maroni was not going to sing and Miss Stella must hear Maroni. However it's all right. I've just sent down to the theater, and they say he is expected to-night."

He smiled approvingly at Stella in the white dress.

Ronald came into the room and drew a chair up to the table.

"Have you ~~got~~ an amusing dinner to-night?"

asked Sir Edgar quite unconscious of Ronald's keen annoyance.

Sir Edgar with all his sentences and his great love for his son, knew very little of what went on in the young man's mind and heart. Ronald was devoted to his father, yet rarely spoke to him of any intimate subject. He was woven of far more sensitive fiber, and the fear that he would have to explain his feelings to the older man entirely arrested the flow of his confidence. Thus these two lived very near together and very far apart. Ronald however saw deeper into his father's thoughts than the latter imagined, and he noted now, with a curious pang, how interested Sir Edgar seemed in Stella, and what was worse, how pleased Stella seemed to be with him. As he looked at his father's thin clear-cut face, his bright keen eyes, his general air of distinction, he thought it only too probable that a girl might fall in love with him. Sometimes our intuition goes so far in advance of fact that our reason pulls it back. In another moment Ronald was laughing at himself for the notion. "My father will never marry again," he said, "it isn't in him to fall in love." With this consoling thought, he got up to go, and shook hands with Stella and her aunt.

Martin came in very late; there had been a division in the House, and he had been stopped by their whip just as he was starting.

He glanced across the table, and Stella smiled at him shyly. Her smiles were rarely as tentative. But everything was tentative with Martin; she did not know what she felt for him or what he thought about her.

"Miss Morecombe," he said, leaning forward across the table, "I hope you know the story of the opera?"

He, like Sir Edgar and Ronald, felt that everything must be done to make Stella's first musical experience a complete one, and his whole interest was aroused. He had accepted Sir Edgar's invitation at once, and gone straight to his sister to ask her if she would forgive him for throwing her over that evening.

"Well, I won't let you off unless you tell me where you are going," said Mrs. Grantham, mischievously, for she knew quite well that Stella was in London.

Then Martin explained to her how interesting it would be to see this curious child, who had never been inside a theater in her life, and who was besides brimming over with music, at her first opera.

"Oh, if it is Stella, of course I give in," she said and then wished she had not expressed so much. "I'm half in love with her," she added.

"So am I," answered Martin lightly.

When Martin told Stella he hoped she knew the story of the "Meistersinger," he was really hoping she did not, for he would have liked to tell it her himself.

"I think I know quite enough," said Stella. "I know there is a young knight who falls in love with a burgomaster's daughter and sings the 'Preislied' for her."

"Yes, that will do," said Martin, "and you have Sir Edgar and myself at your disposal for anything else you may want to know.

When the door of the box was opened, and Stella stepped in, she saw the rows of seats and the tiers of boxes, filling rapidly with women in bright silks and satins, most of them wearing shining tiaras, and she felt as if the play were beginning already.

The first notes of the overture had not yet sounded, but the orchestra was tuning up, and everyone seemed to be talking around her. She felt quite dazed, and let Martin help her to take off her cloak, without any comment. He was watching her attentively, and saw her glance up at the big glass chandelier, then round at the boxes and finally at the drop-scene, with an expression of bewildered excitement. He sat down in the chair behind her, just as the triumphant chords of the overture were beginning. . .

The beauty and joy of life is perhaps the greatest of all Art's themes. We are apt to think that the inspiration of sorrow is in itself a higher thing than the inspiration of joy. But this is only because joy is a rarer emotion, and less easily understood. Almost every nature, however light, can sink, at least once, into the depths of sorrow, but only a few can ever rise to the heights of joy.

People talk of the eternal beauty and inspiration of young love in the spring, but how many are there who treat the blue-bell wood and the singing of the nightingale only as a convenient stage property of their own romance, who know nothing of the exultation which made Keats write his ode, or Wagner his "Preislied." These great pæans of joy will speak to them only in their narrow and personal meaning, and stir them far less than representations of grief or tragedy; but profounder natures will find a higher inspiration in supreme joy than in any sorrow save one—the Divine Sorrow of Christ. For sorrow is earthly and human, and joy is mysterious and spiritual. But perhaps as the life of the spirit can only be reached through the life of the body, joy can only be seen like a star from the deep wells of sorrow.

Stella had never known grief at all, but it seemed almost as if she could be spared the

experience; she had a natural instinct for joy, which carried her above its merely personal aspects. Every note of that wonderful celebration of youth and hope and spring, which is called the "Meistersinger," summoned her soul, and she listened first with amused delight to the joyous humor of the opening act, and gradually with deeper and deeper emotion. She felt as if she herself were a string in the orchestra, vibrating with the thrill of one of the most exquisite melodies in the world. There is a moment in the opera, when the lovers suddenly see each other, and Walther instantly bursts into the "Preislied," while Eva listens entranced by the splendor of his wooing. This moment was like a light suddenly flashed into Stella's eyes, almost blinding her with its brightness. She could scarcely control herself, she trembled and caught hold of each side of her chair. Martin could see how stirred she was, and he too was strangely uplifted by the music. He moved his chair forward a little, and then, putting out his hand almost as if he did not know hers was there, he touched it gently. Stella's arm was stiff in its strained position, but the moment she felt Martin's hand, she slid hers into it with a pretty half leaning of her body toward him. It was only for a second, but she clasped his fingers tightly. Then she drew her hand softly away, and apparently became absorbed

once more in the music. Martin sank back in his chair, amazed at himself. That short moment when he held Stella's hand in his, had changed everything for him; he felt an almost irresistible longing to put his arms round her then and there and carry her away with him. The rest of the evening passed in a sort of mist, and they did not speak to each other again—only when the performance was over, Martin helped her on with her cloak, and he let his hand rest on her shoulders for an instant. She was his, he felt she was his, and he was impatient.

Stella did not listen to Aunt Maisie's raptures as they drove back; the fat old lady had been rather too hot, though she would not have admitted such a thing for the world. She did not understand Stella's silence, and she tried to make up to Sir Edgar by thanking him profusely and praising the singers most of the way home.

Stella looked out of the window of the brougham as they rattled down the emptying streets, and wondered at the strings of carriages waiting to take up their owners, and at the sleepless omnibuses which passed them now and then.

London at night is like a great animal breathing heavily in its sleep, and from time to time unconsciously moving some of its limbs. One feels it might awake at any moment and stretch itself and then begin to roar again with its huge voice.

"Did you enjoy it?" asked Sir Edgar in a low tone as he held Stella's hand for a moment on the stairs. She looked up at him with a glowing expression on her face—she had almost forgotten her kind host, but his words brought a flood of gratitude over her feeling, and she pressed his hand and said, "Thank you, thank you!" with so much fervor that Sir Edgar felt completely rewarded. He rejected the gratitude which was meant for him, and almost dared to appropriate that air of quickened emotion which as yet belonged to no one.

CHAPTER IX.

"Love makes those young whom age doth chill
And whom he finds young, keeps young still."

WHEN Stella awoke next morning the first thing she thought of was Martin Bagehot's face as he said good-night to her, and the remembrance came with a strange thrill—a thrill such as she had never before felt. It translated itself, however, only into a great desire to see him again. Mrs. Grantham was coming to luncheon, and perhaps he would send a message by his sister. All kinds of ideas floated into her head; would he write to her or send her a present? Everything was possible except that he should make no further sign at all.

It had been arranged the night before that Sir Edgar should take Lady Hambledon and Stella into the Park; he was one of those men who make a regular instance of seeing their friends in that way, and he was anxious, although he did not formulate this to himself, to be seen there with Stella. Lady Hambledon was pleased to go too; she hoped to see some old mothers and some new daughters.

Sir Edgar's carriage was to take Stella and her aunt first on a round of inevitable shopping, and they were to meet their host in the Park. Ronald declared at breakfast his intention of being there too, which made his father look up for a moment. No comment, however, was made.

When Stella started to walk down the Row with Sir Edgar and her aunt, her heart began to beat with excitement. Every girl seemed to be both gay and pretty; they were all laughing and talking, and she longed to laugh and talk too. The very presence of other people acts like a stimulant on some natures, and Stella, though she never forgot to watch for the appearance of one special figure, was elated and pleased by all the notice she herself attracted. Several people stopped to shake hands either with her aunt or Sir Edgar, and Stella was always introduced. She overheard one of Lady Hambledon's oldest friends whisper that she was a lovely girl, and the color rose in her cheeks with keen pleasure. It was not exactly vanity which animated her, but an innocent delight in finding herself approved.

But in the meantime Martin did not appear, and Stella gradually gave up all hope of seeing him, as the ranks began to grow thinner. She listened with great attention to Sir Edgar while he told her how he had come upon Martin one

morning drawing pictures with colored chalk upon the pavement.

When we tell a story, even though it redounds only to the credit of somebody else, it is impossible to detach the praise which it evokes from ourselves. Most of us have seen a man delighted with the reception of an anecdote in which he himself played but a foolish part. Sir Edgar understood nothing of Stella's interest in the story of the pavement. He was pleased only with her ready response, and the laughter in her eyes. He could not recognize his own mood as he glanced round him—the sun had often shone like this, the trees had looked as green, the birds had twittered before, and yet it all seemed new to him. For although he hardly knew it, his heart was once more awake. After they left the Park Stella walked just in front with Ronald, and Sir Edgar could find nothing to say to Lady Hambledon, who however chattered on unabashed. She, at any rate, was quite aware of what was going on, and the sight half exasperated and half amused her.

"You are very absent this morning," she said, and Sir Edgar pulled himself together with a start. He did not attempt to deny the charge—he knew better.

"It comes from living so much alone," he explained.

Lady Hambledon laughed. "What extraordinary delusions people do have!" she said. "Do you really imagine that you are a hermit?"

"My dear Lady Hambledon," answered Sir Edgar, "you do not know how lonely I feel sometimes in this crowded London."

Sir Edgar looked so pathetic that Lady Hambledon very inconsequently touched his arm and said, "Why don't you marry then?" and the moment she asked the question, she wished she had not. She thought of Stella, and hastily added, "Someone who would be a companion for you, not too—er—flighty."

"You are recommending me a housekeeper," he said gravely. "No, no, I did not mean . . ."

But they were interrupted by finding themselves at Bruton Street. Stella ran straight upstairs to take off her things, and Sir Edgar turned into his library.

Lady Hambledon's carelessly uttered words had aroused a storm within him. "Marry!" she had said—"Marry!"—could she possibly wish him to marry Stella. Everything which had been surging in him unexpressed during the last two days, was released, and flooded his being. That would be life, youth, freedom, for him. But he must not think of it—he determined he would not; he would love her always and watch over her, but he would not ask her to marry him.

He sat down as if he meant to write, but did nothing except stare in front of him; then he began walking restlessly up and down. He hardly knew what he was thinking or feeling, but something far below in his heart had rebelled and was taking possession of his being. He was young again, he remembered his spirit of adventure, he felt ready to dare anything. The veil which actually hung over his spirits seemed to have been suddenly drawn aside, and he could see a blue horizon in the distance.

At this moment, he heard Stella's voice, and his heart stopped beating—was she coming downstairs? He longed to get as far away from her as possible, and yet when he heard her turn the handle of the door, he could not repress his joy.

"Oh!" said Stella on the threshold, "I did not know anyone was here. I came to fetch my music which I left behind."

"Come in," said Sir Edgar, making a step toward her.

His manner was so strange that Stella stopped half shyly; then, as he said nothing more, she began looking for her books. Her back was turned to him when he suddenly, to his own great surprise, stretched out his arms toward her.

"Miss Stella," he said in a low repressed tone, "you must listen to me."

Stella, when she saw his face, flushed scarlet, and then turned very pale; she kept her eyes on the ground.

"I don't know what you will think of me," continued Sir Edgar, "but I must tell you that I love you. I loved you from the very first moment, as I have never loved anyone before. You are a child, and I am an old man compared to you; but I worship you."

Stella made some slight gesture, and Sir Edgar drew a step nearer.

"Don't think I am such a coxcomb as to fancy you can possibly care for me—but I can give you so much," he spoke quicker and quicker as if half afraid and half ashamed of what he was saying. "I am rich, you know, and there is nothing in the world you should not have; you should travel, and dance and play your music, and ride—you should have your own way in everything. I would ask nothing from you except the privilege of living near you."

There was a long pause—Stella said nothing at all, and the silence seemed to throb with intensity.

At last Sir Edgar took one of her hands.

"Won't you say anything to me," he asked humbly.

Stella was overcome with shyness.

"I can't marry you," she said after another pause with great vehemence.

"Don't give me an answer now," he said. "I implore you not to—take your own time and think over it. It means everything to me."

"No, no, no!" cried Stella, "I don't want any time. I could never marry you. I don't want any of those things—oh! I can't explain—but I could never love you."

Sir Edgar let her hand drop quietly.

"What a fool I am!" he said with a slight touch of bitterness. "I am disappointed because I cannot have what I never expected to have."

He turned away, and Stella felt like a naughty child. This was an unendurable situation for her—she never could bear to be in disgrace. So she put her hand rather timidly on his arm.

"I wish I could," she said, "but I can't."

"No, no, child!" he cried quickly. "I had no right to ask you—but I thought perhaps I could make you as happy as anyone—you are like the very goddess of enjoyment. I would give so much and ask so little. But it was a dream, only a dream. Let us put it away and you will forget all about it, and be my little friend Stella again."

His face was very sad as he spoke.

Stella had moved toward him, and for a moment he held her in his arms. She kissed him quite simply—she could not bear to see him unhappy, and then she ran out of the room. She

was not unhappy herself, only startled and uneasy, but there was a faint note of triumph just beginning to sound in her thoughts.

Sir Edgar said nothing—he could not have spoken after she kissed him—he stood still in the middle of the room until the luncheon bell roused him.

Then he had to go upstairs and greet Mrs. Grantham, who was sitting in a chair with Stella leaning against the arm, talking to her very eagerly. The girl looked rather embarrassed when he said to her, "Shall we go down," but his perfect composure of manner reassured her, and she led the way arm in arm with Grace.

"You must come up to my room after," she whispered in her ear. "I don't count this as seeing you."

At luncheon she sat next to Ronald who devoted himself entirely to her. Ronald was conscious of a vague discomfort, he had found Stella rather absent on their walk home, and he felt that he was gaining no ground. For a moment he wondered whether, in spite of her musical talent, she really had the artistic temperament which he thought so marked in himself—she seemed to ignore him altogether when he used a metaphor or colored his speech in any way. Stella in reality had been absorbed, first in her thoughts about Martin, and now in the remem-

brance of her episode with Sir Edgar. She had always in her mind treated Ronald as a chorus to her own drama, and she was oblivious when he tried to intrude upon the action.

"You have not played to me once," he said in a low tone full of feeling.

"No, I haven't had time," she answered in a loud enough voice for everyone to hear, "but I'll play after lunch if you like."

She was looking at Grace, who answered her with a smile. "You must play us the 'Preislied.' I saw Martin this morning, and he told me how you liked it."

Stella's cheeks grew faintly pinker.

"No, no!" she cried, "I shall never attempt to play it. I don't want to spoil it for myself, and if I had to count and say one, two, three, and wonder about my fingering; it would be like trying to bottle moonlight."

"Yes, you are right," said Ronald again—but Grace laughed.

"I don't think the comparison is very good," she said. "Someone has to learn the notes if you are ever to hear them."

"It isn't the notes only," cried Stella half-impatiently, "it was something else last night—the glamour—the romance . . ."

She stopped suddenly as she caught Sir Edgar's eyes fixed upon her.

Her words absolutely hurt Ronald physically; not that he was jealous of Martin or of his father, but he felt himself all at once entirely outside her life. To have missed perhaps through a trifling accident—the privilege of being with someone we love when they were stirred to joy or sorrow, is a life-long disadvantage in intimacy. The most dissimilar natures are sometimes shaken, as it were, into sympathy by the forces of an emotion experienced in common; and if two people who love each other are thus privileged, the walls between them fall down, and for a moment they are completely revealed the one to the other.

Ronald felt that his chance was gone; he hardly formulated it to himself, but his anger at not having been with Stella the evening before was almost intolerable.

"Come up to my room now," whispered Stella to Grace as soon as she could. "We are off in an hour and I must see you first."

Perhaps nothing in the world is quite so engrossing as the first few talks between new friends—the country is all fresh, every turn reveals vistas, and the horizon gleams in a distance which seems to lie beyond this life. Stella described all she had felt the night before at the opera—as much, that is to say, as was possible without mentioning Martin's name. She was excited by her interview with Sir Edgar, and by

the sympathy shining in Grace's eyes, and she detailed her sensations with great vividness.

"I felt," she said, "as if something had suddenly woke up in me—I once saw a flower open its petals, perhaps that was more like what I felt—any way I am sure I have never been so happy in my whole life."

"What is it that makes you so happy?" asked Grace rather wistfully.

"I don't know," cried Stella, "only I feel that everything is coming—it's like sunrise."

"There are some people for whom the sun has set," answered Grace.

"Don't, don't!" cried Stella really angry. She jumped up and put her hand on her friend's mouth. "I won't let you say those things. I won't hear them," and she stamped her foot.

"You are a funny child," said Grace quietly—she felt instinctively that Stella's emotion must be soothed, so she refrained from the warning which was on her lips. The girl's glowing face half-saddened her—but she changed the talk.

"Stella," she said, "I hope you realize that Ronald Pierson is falling in love with you."

"Ronald," cried Stella, "Ronald! Oh! that is really too much!" and she went off into a peal of laughter. "Oh dear! oh dear, and I have only just escaped being his mother!"

"What do you mean?" said Grace.

"Why, Sir Edgar," and Stella nodded her head.

Grace burst out laughing, threw herself back in her chair and shook with mirth. When the humor of a situation moved her she could almost be cruel, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say rough; though no one could be so tender and understanding if her sympathy were once aroused.

"It happened just before luncheon," cried Stella and then Grace remembered that laughter can be heard far more easily than weeping, and that it has a peculiar power of torturing a wounded heart. She stopped abruptly.

"We mustn't laugh," she said. "He might hear us—poor man—but how could he think you would ever marry him?"

"He was very nice," said Stella reflectively. "I was to have everything I wanted—horses and carriages, and journeys and everything."

"That was like bribery and corruption," said Grace with a tinge of indignation in her voice.

"It wasn't the right sort for me," answered Stella lightly. "I want more romance about it than that."

"You must tell Maisie," said Grace after a pause.

"Oh, I can't, I really can't," cried Stella in dismay, "why should I?"

"She would be hurt if she ever heard it from anyone but you."

"I can't help it," declared Stella, "I simply cannot tell her. Some people one can tell things to, and other people one can't, and Aunt Maisie is one of those."

"Still, it's not worth while to hurt her feelings. Make an effort," urged Grace.

Stella almost pouted.

"I don't believe Sir Edgar would like me to speak about it to anyone," she said in a virtuous voice.

"Then you oughtn't to have told me," cried Grace. She finished her sentence in a laugh and got up to go. "If you don't tell her I shall," she declared. "So you had better do it yourself."

"You've no right to tell her," cried Stella, her eyes flashing, "and I won't let you." But her anger passed like lightning, and she flung her arms round Grace's neck.

"Please don't tell her," she said, and Grace promised. She had caught the habit of giving in to Stella like everyone else, she said to herself after she got away. It was not very good for the child, and she was sorry she had as usual let her affection blind her to what was best for those she loved. Next time it should be different.

CHAPTER X.

" By absence this good means I gain,
That I can catch her,
Where none can watch her,
In some close corner of my brain :
There I embrace and kiss her ;
And so I both enjoy and miss her."

MARTIN BAGEHOT'S rooms were very luxurious, not merely in the gross matter of comfortable armchairs and sofas, but in every detail arranged to please both the eye and the mind. There were many of his own vigorous and clever drawings hung on the walls, besides other sketches by artists known and unknown. For Martin was quite indifferent to fame, he bought whatever struck him as good ; and often he had the gratification of being the first to recognize a rising talent. On the floor were generally one or two dark and dingy oil paintings which he declared were going to develop under his hand into famous Italian pictures. His friends laughed at him, but he had once or twice made some clever discoveries. One of his many ambitions was to build up a really good collection of pictures for the great bare place he was some

day to inherit; a scheme which the present possessor—his uncle—would have looked upon as madness. For the uncle was diligently saving money, not for his nephew, whom he strongly disliked, but merely from the inability to spend it. It was therefore always rumored that Martin would be enormously rich at some not very distant date. . . Nothing makes a man more generally liked and honored than this rumor—far more indeed than actual possession of riches, for these bring their responsibilities and claims, and a refusal to give is always counted unto a rich man for a transgression.

The afternoon after the performance of the "Meistersinger," Martin was walking up and down his room. He never lived in the half light of doubt or hesitation or unconsciousness; he always knew what he wanted and what he felt; and at this hour he knew that he was hopelessly in love with Stella. A hundred inconsequent ideas flitted across the foreground of his brain, but in the background stood Stella smiling at him. An answering smile kept breaking continually over his face; for he could see her so plainly before him. When he figured that upward glance of her eyes as she leant toward him the evening before, the strings of his nature vibrated. He could not stand still—he stretched out his arms for Stella—his love, his joy in lov-

ing, the thrill of this new passion became almost painful. Men—and women too—so often trifle with the dignity of love, and, instead of waiting patiently for its real advent, cherish meager and unworthy satisfactions! They may turn aside in time, but the first rapture of complete fulfillment, will have been inevitably weakened for ever. But there are some, and Martin was one of these, who have discarded the lesser gifts, and who, when they open their arms for the first time, clasp what is able to satisfy their whole lives. The beginning of all love may be much the same—but the growth, the maturity, the close may differ as meteors differ from dead sea-shells. . .

Martin made no mistakes with himself—he knew that Stella was his love, and he was determined to win her. He wondered what Grace would think . . . had Stella any money—could they marry on what he had—but would she marry him at all? This was the check that always brought his thoughts to a standstill—would she love him? He had never been refused affection when he had given it, Many people disliked him heartily, but he had usually taken the initiative and begun by detesting them. His confidence was therefore unimpaired, and yet when he began to think of Stella—of her talent, her rare beauty, her elusive charm, he felt doubt-

ful. He must begin at once to make an impression upon her—how was it to be done? No one would help him except Grace—she was intimate with Stella already, in the rapid manner of women. And Grace would guess his emotions without explanation; it would be best to go and tell her instantly.

Mrs. Grantham lived in a small house in that debatable land which is neither Kensington nor Belgravia. She had never moved from it since the death of her husband, and kept everything about it unchanged. It certainly was not pretty; for when she married, people were still giving ormolu ornaments for wedding presents; and when she first furnished, the preliminary waves of æstheticism had twisted the legs and developed the angles of everything useless or useful. But the frame of her memory was precious to her, and she would not alter it. She had taken up her lonely life in the same surroundings with great courage, clinging as she expressed it, only to Martin. He, for his part, considered that she was in his charge, and constantly remonstrated with her for overworking, and reproved her for allowing herself to get dull and dowdy. Now and then Grace resented this. "You ought to know why I am dull," she would say half reproachfully. Herbert Grantham had been Martin's great hero, as well as friend, and their

common love of him had drawn the brother and sister very close. Martin in reality never forgot his sister's sorrow, but he wanted to bring gayety and brightness into her life, and often forced her into some form of social energy. She saw a great deal of him, for he brought every detail of his life under her inspection, and not only asked, but even sometimes took, her advice upon all his decisions.

Martin, having now made up his mind to consult her as usual, started off at once.

"If only she isn't at some mothers' meeting, dear old girl!" he said as he put his latchkey into the door. When Martin first took rooms in London, he had, at Grace's request, put the same lock on his door as she had on hers. "Then you can always come in without ringing," she said, "and I can fancy you are living in the house." He peeped into the dining room before he went upstairs, and noticed with surprise a heap of books and photograph frames on the table, and some furniture piled up in a corner. He wondered what was going on, bounded up the stairs three steps at a time, and burst into the drawing room.

A low murmur of voices met his ears—five or six rows of chairs were occupied by ladies, some shabbily, some smartly dressed, with here and there an old man of the type who, having

nothing to do, sadly attend drawing-room meetings.

A tall lady dressed in black was addressing the audience, standing by a small table. Grace was in the front row listening with the greatest attention. When she heard the door open, she turned round hurriedly and saw Martin. Her first impulse was to laugh, her second to implore him by an agonized gesture to go away. The speaker paused a moment, while Martin, quite unmoved, sat down upon an empty chair and, with a perfectly grave mouth and a mischievous light in his eyes, composed himself to listen. . .

Grace covered her face with her hand; she wanted to laugh, but she did not dare to disturb her friend's speech. The knowledge that some mocking spirit has entered the room, makes our criticism overacute, and words which would have passed quite unnoticed but for this consciousness, suddenly assume an absurd incongruity.

The lady was speaking earnestly in favor of burial reform.

"We have only a leasehold of this life," she was saying, in a passage which struck her as really inspiring, "everything is ours only for a time, and shall we, from an absurd prejudice against baskets, poison the lives of those who come after us . . . ah! let each one of us resolve . . ," and so on.

Martin pulled out a pencil, and on the back of a notice which he found on his chair, began rapidly making notes for a reply. They were of this nature. "Beauty of the human form." "Sinful to allow its destruction." "Egyptian practice of mummifying." "Art easily learned." "Would solve the unemployed question."

At the bottom he drew a picture of the speaker stretched out as a mummy. After folding the paper, he begged the ladies in front of him to pass it on to Mrs. Grantham.

Grace read the notes, and in a fever of apprehension looked round—the lady had just sat down—Martin was rising from his chair preparatory to speaking. The situation was desperate. Grace jumped up.

"The meeting," she said, "must be adjourned . . . it was fortunate that they had been able to listen to Mrs. H.'s most interesting address, and unfortunate that they had to miss the rest," she hesitated and stammered, and at last sat down with a red face. The ladies all got up—they at once concluded that Mrs. Grantham's brother had brought her bad news, and went out whispering together. Grace and Martin were left facing each other.

"How could you?" she said reproachfully. "Those poor women have gone without their tea."

Martin closed the door and then burst out laughing.

"Oh, it was my duty," he cried. "Grace, Grace, how incorrigible you are, how can you waste your time with such trash?"

"It isn't trash," cried Grace feebly. "I don't care much about it myself, but Mrs. H. is an enthusiast, and she asked me to lend her my room."

"Well," said Martin, "if ever I am Home Secretary, I shall recommend this way of breaking up anarchist meetings."

"What do you want?" asked Grace, not quite appeased, "for I know you want something."

"Of course!" cried Martin. "Can't you guess what it is?"

He caught hold of Grace's hands and looked at her almost seriously.

She made no response.

"I want to tell you something," he went on.

Grace pulled her hands away vehemently.

"You are in love with Stella," she exclaimed.

Martin nodded his head.

"Oh!" cried Grace. "I can't talk about it here?" looking round at the rows of empty chairs. "Come downstairs to my morning room, and tell me everything that has happened."

And in the quiet comfortable little room, Martin told her all he could—there were no

facts—only feelings; and he was not diffident, so he needed no encouragement. He merely claimed her warm sympathy, which had never in his life been denied him.

"You saw her yesterday," he asked eagerly.

"Yes, I went there to luncheon," answered Grace. "She has gone back home—why did you miss this opportunity?"

"I didn't miss it," said Martin. "It wasn't an opportunity, that's all. I had so much to do this morning, I didn't find out for certain whether I was in love with her or not. It wasn't till I had a quiet hour by myself that I knew."

Grace laughed. "It sounds rather too deliberate, even now," she said.

"Deliberate!" cried Martin. "Why I've only seen the child three times."

Then he drew plans for the future—first of all the ground plan of ways and means, then gradually a higher and higher edifice of dual ambitions and dual attainments.

"You mustn't laugh!" he said to Grace, who was very far from laughing. "One can never build castles on the earth, if one hasn't first built them in the air. . ."

He did not notice the slight look of sadness in Grace's eyes. She could hardly have defined it herself; but the echoes of her own love were sounding again, and with them the even deeper

note of regret for a change in the old familiar things which belonged to the days of her youth. Those we have played with when our steps were still uncertain, are bound up with our lives in an inexplicable fashion; childhood may be past, and yet we always play a little whenever we are with them; and the parting of the ways is doubly sad because, with the playfellow, a portion of our youth goes, and some of the lightness of our hearts is blown away.

CHAPTER XI.

". . . souls whom some benignant breath
Has charmed at birth from gloom or care."

STELLA went back to Leyton, for the moment quite satisfied. When she returned from the Grange, she was eager—impatient—for more pleasure and experience—but now she felt ready to pause and think over all that had happened.

She hardly realized that she was beginning to fall in love with Martin, for it was decreed that no uncertainty, no doubts, no disappointments were to assail her happiness as it grew up swiftly and silently around her. Most people have to undergo suffering before they can reach joy, but Stella was different, and her heart opened without pain. It was her peculiar gift that she knew when she was happy—her peculiar difficulty, that she feared sorrow so intensely. She was impatient with anyone in her world who was not as radiant as herself, and resented the faintest shadow thrown across her path.

Martin lost no time after his confession to Grace. He had no doubts himself, and he was determined that Stella should not have any either.

The first thing he did was to send her anonymously the programme of a big orchestral concert, hoping it might tempt her to come up to London. Then every morning he dispatched some portions of the music which was to be played, nicely calculated so that she should have the entire concert by the right morning. Stella was greatly excited by these constant presents. She had shown the programme originally to Fräulein, and the arrival of the music was too interesting and amusing a fact to conceal.

She had no doubt in her mind at first that the whole thing was done by Sir Edgar. She told Fräulein that she was sure the music came from him, and that he was a very old gentleman, and might easily have been her father. This was said in order to pacify the governess' anxious chaperon spirit: but, as Fräulein reflected, fathers do not generally send presents every day. She was nervously anxious to prevent Stella going up to London, but Stella was equally determined to go. She went to her father and asked him for permission.

Mr. Morecombe was in the middle of an experiment, he hardly looked up as he said "Yes," and Stella came back triumphant, and only laughed at Fräulein's worried expression.

When the day came, it was so hot and the sun so blinding that Fräulein hoped fervently Stella

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would change her mind. But by that morning's post, had arrived a well-bound copy of the "Meistersinger," and the moment she undid the parcel, a conviction that Martin had sent the book possessed her.

She hid it from Fräulein—feeling it might betray too much—and put on her prettiest gown, and pinned her favorite flowers in her lace.

There was a slight element of adventure and rebellion in the expedition, which pleased her; she felt very mischievous and ready to tease poor Fräulein, who sat opposite to her in the train, anxious lines showing between her eyebrows.

"What would you think, Fräulein," began Stella, "if I were to meet a very good-looking young man on the platform at Waterloo?"

"Stella! Stella!" cried Fräulein Schmidt, throwing up her hands. "Pray do not jest on such a subject."

"But what would you do," persisted Stella.

"I should make you come home at once."

"You won't be able to," said Stella, laughing. "I shall say to him—'Let's jump into a hansom and leave her behind.'"

"You are joking, I know," Fräulein answered uneasily.

"Well, you just watch carefully when we arrive—that's all," cried naughty Stella.

This made Fräulein hotter than ever—she did

not know what to think, and Stella preserved a perfectly impassive face.

When the train steamed into the station, she put her head out of window and pretended to nod to someone, while Fräulein attempted to pull her back. Stella gave up the game with ripples of laughter.

"Oh, Fräulein," she cried, "you look quite pale with fright—there wasn't anything so very awful about it, even if it hadn't been a joke."

But the heat and the anxiety had been too much for the poor governess, and she weakly let a few lukewarm tears escape her eyes.

Stella said rather sharply, "Don't be silly, Fräulein," and then took no further notice until they arrived at the concert hall.

When they were once seated, she looked round her with a sense of expectation—her face was slightly flushed and her eyes very bright. . . Though she could not see Martin, she felt certain that he was in the hall; and half from a provocative instinct and half from shyness, she bent over her programme and never looked up again.

Martin was not far from her, but he had made up his mind not to speak to her until the concert was over. He saw with pleasure that she had brought all the music with her, and she and Fräulein were following the notes with great conscientiousness. Fräulein occasionally gave a furtive

glance round to see if any middle-aged baronet was fixing his gaze upon Stella; but as the time wore on, she grew more and more reassured, and was beginning to hope that no adventure at all would occur.

The music was over at last, and Stella, vaguely disappointed, moved slowly away with the large crowd. She had given up the idea of seeing Martin, when suddenly, at the foot of the stairs, she caught sight of his upturned face watching her. Her eyes lit up again, and she smiled and bowed. Fräulein saw that she had recognized someone, and began pulling her dress, saying that they had better go out by another exit. Stella was very much irritated. "What *is* the matter?" she said brusquely. "I'm not going out any other way ~~but~~ this."

"Que dira Lady Hambledon?—Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" cried poor Fräulein.

Stella turned to her again. "What are you in such a fuss about?" she said. "You needn't be afraid; I wasn't bowing to Sir Edgar Pierson—it is only Mr. Bagehot who is down there."

"Monsieur Bagehot, Monsieur Bagehot," murmured Fräulein Schmidt. . . By this time Martin had met them and taken Stella's hand.

"Who are you with?" he asked.

"Fräulein Schmidt," answered Stella demurely. "Fräulein, this is Mr. Bagehot."

The little German lady bowed stiffly. This was even worse than she expected.

"We must have a cab," she said hurriedly, "for the train."

"I have got a proposal to make," said Martin in his blandest tones. "Just round the corner here there is a shop where one can have superb strawberries and cream, and I want you and Miss Morecombe to come and have some before you go to the station."

"I should love it!" said Stella eagerly. "You know, Fräulein, we always have time for tea at the station, and this would be much nicer." She was so afraid Fräulein would refuse, that there was an extra tone of soft pleading in her voice. To her surprise the governess only said: "Very well, very well," with a faint smile at Martin.

The thought of iced strawberries and cream, after the hot concert, and something in the charm of Martin's manner had vanquished her conscience.

Long after, Stella and Martin used to recall this adventure as one of the most pleasant in their memories. There was just a flavor of naughtiness about it, and of secrecy—they understood each other well enough to make every moment together a delight, and they understood each other little enough to make every word, every trifle significant and important. Martin took Stella's music from her.

"Did you find it a help?" he said.

Stella laughed. "It was delightful to have it," she admitted, and then added, "Do you know that someone sent it to me anonymously? A piece used to arrive every morning." She looked up at him with a twinkle in her eyes.

"Really!" cried Martin, "I wonder if that was why you came to this concert?"

Stella got a little pink. "We often come up for concerts," she said evasively.

The strawberries and cream were a great success. Fräulein's uneasiness had disappeared, and the three talked together about music until the last moment. Just before Stella stepped into the cab, Martin pressed her hand.

"You are not angry with me, are you?" he asked irrelevantly.

Stella gave him an eloquent look, and disappeared into the shadow of a hansom. She could hardly have spoken—she felt quite giddy with the whirl of new emotions . . . and leant back with her eyes closed.

Fräulein Schmidt thought the heat had been too much for her—and so in a sense it had.

CHAPTER XII.

"Those words which are kisses,
Those kisses which say
What a word often misses
Or frightens away."

AFTER the strawberry and cream episode, Stella admitted, with a kind of awe, that she loved Martin. She kept saying his name softly over to herself a hundred times in the day. There was no pain, no hurt pride, no bitterness in the admission, for she was sure that he also loved her. Martin, indeed, had not allowed her a moment's doubt,—he did not write to her, but every day he sent her a drawing. Stella has them still—all carefully pasted into a book: They are her treasured love-letters. She did not always understand quite what they meant, but they said, "I love you, I love you," in very plain language. One morning it would be only a spray of flowers—another a glorious sunrise—often she herself was the central figure—plucking the fruit off a tree, or playing at a piano. She longed to make some sign in return, but she did not venture. "If he were here," she thought, "I could make him

understand by playing to him." Her eager nature seemed to be soothed, and she had what can only be described as the love-light in her eyes.

At last one day Lady Hambledon drove over to say that Martin had proposed himself to the Grange for a week's visit. Stella's heart bounded forward at the thought of meeting him again. She blushed and could not quench the joy in her eyes. Lady Hambledon understood at once; it was against all her principles to encourage early marriages, and she felt that Stella ought to see more of life first. But she judged, and judged rightly, that rules of this sort must be elastic, and to miss your happiness because it came to you too soon, would be as disastrous as missing it because it came too late. She was convinced that Martin and Stella were made for each other, and this being the case, the sooner they found it out the better. Martin was, besides, a very good match for Stella from every point of view —rich—and to be far richer when he succeeded his uncle—clever, and artistic enough to understand Stella—a task which Lady Hambledon was beginning to find rather difficult herself. So she encouraged Martin to come, and mischievously consulted Stella as to whether she should ask anyone else to amuse him.

The week came at last—a week of enchanted dreaming. The first look from Martin's eyes led

Stella into a wonderland of mysterious unrealities, in which they wandered apart—alone together. Nature seemed to be conspiring to please them, the long summer days made for them alone, the twilight, when they rode together, the moonlit evenings.

There is a charm about half-fulfilled desire which nothing can quite equal; the gross touch of reality is not there to dispel illusion, and anticipation dances over all obstacles. Composers know the value of a pause in music, but it is curious that few people recognize its value in happiness; when the fruit is close to your hand, pause a moment before you touch it; when the doors of your cage are opened, wait a little before you fly away.

Martin had the science of pleasure in his blood, and he kept such reserve power of enjoyment that nothing ever lasted quite long enough for him. The sense that he loved Stella, and that she loved him, was completely satisfying to him —he hardly wished to break the spell which lay upon them and let day after day pass with no change; neither of them could ever have described their talks together—when two people love each other, it is well known that they possess some far subtler and more delicate mode of expression than mere hard words. Very often they did not speak, and Martin would make drawings

of her, sometimes out of doors, sometimes playing. He always complained bitterly of the piano; the ugly dark instrument spoiled his picture. She ought, he said, to have a beautiful, not a hideous, piano to sit at.

"Why don't you invent one for the picture?" Stella asked. Martin declared he could only draw what he saw, but he mentally resolved that some day he would get for her a piano covered with pictures by a great artist.

Stella played to him for hours at a time, and when the heat of the day was over, they rode together. She showed him all her favorite places —St. Martha's hill, and the mere below, and the moor of Blackheath.

When the last day came, he was no nearer taking any decisive step than before. All through the warm hours he wandered about the garden with her—it was very hot, and he felt languid and passive.

Stella on her side was unconsciously irritated by his unchanged demeanor; she had not sufficient grasp of her own sentiments, or of his, to admit to herself that she was disappointed by his silence, but the knowledge that this was the last day clouded her happiness. On most occasions she never looked beyond the present moment, but this parting would press itself upon her memory, and she dreaded it.

As the day wore on, she grew more and more restless, and the light easy talk and silence of their intercourse dropped into complete estrangement. Sitting together under the cedar tree on the lawn, they both waited for some influence from outside to rouse them; Stella was incapable of moving away, and yet to stay still seemed almost more impossible. At last Aunt Maisie called to her, and she jumped up with alacrity. As soon as she was gone, Martin wondered why he had allowed her to leave him. Had he let the right, which is so often the only, moment slip by? What was he thinking about? London looming to-morrow, and no security in the future? His spirit rose within him at this thought, for it needed only the shadow of resistance to arouse his energy. He would take her out riding at once, and win her. He went across to the stables and ordered the horses, and then told Stella what he had done.

"But it isn't cool enough yet," she objected.

"I want to go a very long way," explained Martin. "I'm tired of this garden. I want some fresher air to give me courage."

His expression was very significant of something, though not at all of fear. Stella would have laughed if her heart had not been beating so fast. She said no more, but went upstairs to put on her habit—the sky was serene again—the little fleecy clouds all blown away.

They went a long long way together—out into a wild stretch of moorland which escaped from a wood, and after spreading itself for some few miles, retreated again into another wood. They passed the forked ponds, and waited a moment to listen to the silence which broods upon lonely waters, disturbed now and then by the furtive rustle made by a bird, or the faint splash of a hungry fish. The sun was low before they turned homeward. Martin attempted several times to begin his avowal, but the moment never seemed to come. . . She tried instinctively to ward it off, and he was unwilling to disturb the peace which surrounded them. They said very little to each other, for there was none of that silence between them which has to be hidden by words.

Stella was remembering the evening only six weeks before when she had first seen Martin coming through the gateway. Looking back she could hardly realize that she had ever lived before that day. Life had unfolded itself very quickly since then, and suffered a change into something rich and strange. Her heart swelled within her as she looked toward the glowing west, and breathed in the fragrance of evening. They were just emerging from a low wood on to the moor again, when Martin suddenly pointed into the air, and over their heads passed five great birds, with their white wings outstretched.

"What are they?" asked Stella—strangely moved by the sight.

"Wild swans," cried Martin, taking off his cap to them, "wild swans going home to the forked ponds."

"Well," said Stella half laughing, "I thought there was nothing more in the whole world I could want, and now those birds just seem to add another touch."

"They were splendid," said Martin looking back. "Do you often feel like that?" he asked, "as if your cup was quite, quite full?"

Then Stella began to tell him of her wonderful joy in life. "I am almost too happy," she cried. "The whole world seems to belong to me and to love me." She looked up at Martin who was smiling at her. "I can hardly walk across the grass: I want so much to dance—when I climb up into a tree, I feel as if I were lying in its arms. And then all the noises make such wonderful music, and I can come in and put it all into the piano. There is no end—no limit to anything; I love the night as much as the day. I've heard people say it makes them sad, and I don't know what they mean; I'm sometimes afraid of the dark, but that's different," her voice dropped as if she had raised up a phantom for herself.

Martin was silent for a moment—he could not help wondering how Stella would look if she

were sad. Was it really possible that she had never felt the touch of sorrow?

"Miss Stella," he began, "I want to ask you something, and you need not answer me if you would rather not—have you never had any sorrow at all?"

There was a grave note in his voice which half startled Stella.

"Never — never" . . . she said hurriedly, "why do you ask me? Why should I ever have any? . . ." her voice trembled, and when Martin looked at her, he saw that her eyes were brimming with tears.

"What is it?" he asked gently.

"You oughtn't to have reminded me," cried Stella, half recovering herself. "This was the happiest evening I have ever had, why should you try and spoil it? . . . it isn't fair!" her eyes shone partly with anger, partly with the extra radiance which her half-shed tears lent them.

"You can't get away from sorrow," said Martin. "It's much better to face it boldly; you are sure to meet it some day."

As he said this, they turned into a lane which ran past a churchyard. A peaceful spot with no shadow of good-by upon it—but as if in answer to his words, a woman moved away from a little new-made grave, and came slowly out of the gate toward them. She was all in black, and

when she saw them coming she hastily wiped her eyes and turned aside.

"She has lost her child," said Martin. Suddenly he felt Stella's hand upon his arm. There was an expression of terror in her face, and she clung tighter and tighter to him. He leant toward her, meaning to put his arm round her waist, and soothe her, when all at once her mood changed.

"Come away!" she said quickly. "I can't stop here, I won't think of it—let's gallop!" and off she started. Martin followed her, marveling at her rapid transitions. Stella's spirits seemed to have risen higher than ever. Was she acting, or was she really forgetting? He felt that he could not at this moment say anything to her about his love; her spirit was too jarred, her mood too forced. Gradually her chatter and laughter infected him, and before they reached the Grange, the incident and Stella's sudden fears had sunk into unreality.

Lady Hambledon fully expected to see them both come back with a piece of news for her, and was genuinely disappointed when she met Stella on her way upstairs looking rather pale and tired.

"After all," she reflected, "I dare say it will be as well if he does not speak to her just yet—it would be rather good for Stella to have some doubts about him."

In the evening Stella sat down to the piano. She looked much as usual, but something in the day had stirred in her a deeper emotion than she had yet known, and her sensitive musical expression was at once influenced. There was more intensity—a stronger tone—the airy fantastic mystery which characterized her playing had given place to a more passionate and human rendering of the music. Every note seemed uttered directly at Martin, he felt them touch and turn and twist his heart. His little wayward, joyous Stella!—how lovely she looked in her white gown with that soft light in her eyes. Out of doors the moon was shining, making silvery paths across the grass, which seemed to lead into the unknown—the warm night air came in through the open window, and fanned his desire; when she stopped her music for a moment, he could hear in the obscurity of the trees a nightingale begin to sing.

A sudden impulse made him lean toward Lady Hambledon. "Can I take her out now," he whispered. "I want to . . ."

Lady Hambleton nodded, and her cheeks got slightly pinker. She was moved herself by the look in Martin's eyes, almost as if he had been making love to her; no middle-aged woman can resist the influence of a romance, and at that moment she envied Stella with her whole

heart . . . that heart which had remained so young in her fat comfortable body.

Martin fetched a shawl for Stella, and they stepped out of the open window.

"Do you know how we can get close to the nightingales?" he asked in a low voice, and Stella led him along some dark paths to a gate which opened into a small copse—here they stood for a while and listened. The birds seemed to have heard their steps, for there was no sound except that strange breathing which issues from a wood at night. Everything was waiting—even the moon had hidden behind a cloud.

"Stella, Stella," whispered Martin drawing closer to her, "will you love me?"—she said nothing but she did not move away. He put his arms round her, and pressed her soft body against him.

"Will you love me?" he whispered again—and Stella made some inarticulate sound, felt on his lips, rather than heard by his ears. Her heart was his—for a moment time and space seemed to shrink away;—then the moon came out and shone upon them, and in the darkness of the wood a nightingale began again to sing.

CHAPTER XIII.

" Her eyes were clear as the sun
Her brows were fresh as the day.
She girdled herself with gold
Her robes were manifold."

STELLA was married from the Grange at Mr. Morecombe's special request. She was the heiress of Leyton, and a wedding there would, he said, entail all sorts of bother. Strangely enough therefore he was the only person who made no objection when Stella begged to have the ceremony performed at the little church of St. Martha. Lady Hambledon thought the project absurd. "There's no road," she said, "we shall have to walk up the hill." She was altogether a little annoyed with Stella: to begin with the girl had utterly refused to tell her father about her engagement, and day after day went by while Martin fretted in London, longing to come down and hasten preparations. Of course, as Lady Hambledon said, he ought to have gone straight to Mr. Morecombe himself, but Stella had almost cried at the suggestion—she wanted time, she said. The fact was that she had not the courage to break the news to her father, and

wanted to remain secretly engaged until some accident revealed what had happened. The accident, after two or three days, was Lady Hambledon, who gathered up her courage and drove over to Leyton. Stella saw her come, and waited in agonized suspense while her aunt was in the study. Lady Hambledon wasted no time. "Ralph," she began at once, "I've got something to break to you."

Mr. Morecombe looked at her over his spectacles with a puzzled expression.

"Yes?" he said in a mild and indifferent tone.

"You must prepare yourself for a great shock," she went on, "it's something about Stella."

"Does she want more money?" said the unsuspecting father.

"Yes, she does," assented Lady Hambledon. "But it's much worse than that, she wants . . . oh, Heavens, Ralph can't you guess what she wants?"

Mr. Morecombe took off his spectacles looking rather frightened.

"She wants to go to London I suppose . . ." then seeing by Lady Hambledon's expression that he had not guessed, grew still more uneasy.

"What has the child been doing, Maisie—tell me at once." He never called Lady Hambledon by her Christian name except on very solemn occasions—she was quite awed.

"Nothing wrong, nothing wrong," she asserted hastily. "She has fallen in love with Martin Bagehot, and he with her, and they quite understand each other—that's all," and she drew a long breath.

Mr. Morecombe stared at her for a moment without speaking, and then to his own and her great surprise, his eyes filled with tears, and in a moment he had buried his face in his hands. Lady Hambledon was greatly distressed—it was so very awkward, as she explained afterward, because she was not intimate enough to kiss him, and too near a relation to take no notice. She got up and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Ralph," she said, "Don't! don't! I had no idea you would mind it like this."

He made no answer, and her easy sympathy came over completely to his side—she longed to comfort everyone in trouble, and she always used the first remedy at hand, whether it were a lasting one or no.

"Perhaps it isn't too late," she said now. "She's so young—it might be broken off."

Mr. Morecombe lifted up his head. "It's no good," he said quickly, and then with a break in his voice, "The bird has left the nest already."

He stood up and took her hand.

"I shall be very lonely," he said.

Lady Hambledon put her arms round his neck

and kissed him, and he made no resistance. Looking back, she could not imagine how she had ventured—but at that moment the idea flashed through her brain that the barriers between them were removed once and for all. But reserve is a hedge which sometimes grows up all the quicker for having been cut down, and Ralph Morecombe never again in his life provoked his sister-in-law to kiss him. He very soon recovered his composure, and asked all the necessary questions, and when he found that there were no objections to the match, except Stella's youth, which, according to one of his theories about the transmission of disease, was no objection at all, he gave his consent, and his ready approval of all matters of detail.

He had one solemn and unsatisfactory interview with Stella. She lost an opportunity when she refused to tell him her news herself: for the only effect of Mr. Morecombe's emotion, when he first heard that his daughter meant to leave him, was to make him nervous lest he should break down again. He therefore merely asked Stella the few questions which he thought it his duty to put to her, and which embarrassed both of them most uncomfortably.

Was she sure she knew her own mind? Did she realize the responsibilities of marriage? Then he explained her settlements to her, and

that was all; Stella came away with a great sense of relief that the ordeal was well over, but with no softened place in her heart, or tender pity for her father.

As might have been expected, her new found happiness absorbed her completely—she neither noticed nor sympathized with Fräulein's regrets, but merely claimed her practical help on all occasions. No one except Martin made the slightest impression on her at this time—she thought, dreamt, spoke of nothing but Martin, and the future life with him. It was hardly credible that she should have experienced none of that aching sadness with which one wanders round old familiar rooms when one is saying good-by to them, but so it was.

She stayed at the Grange with Fräulein and her father for two or three days before the wedding—the house was full of friends and relations, and Stella longed for everything to be over—she was not allowed to be much with Martin, and even Grace refused to come to the Grange, but stayed in the village with her brother. Each detail of the ceremony had been planned by Stella, who delighted in imagining all the accessories, and she watched the weather with deep anxiety, for everything would have been spoiled by rain. But the July day dawned gloriously, and Stella came down to breakfast in her wed-

ding gown, looking radiant. She had been quite determined to have nothing conventional about her memories, and insisted upon being married in a high white gown, elaborately simple, so made that she could walk in it through country lanes and across grass fields. It was only with great difficulty that Lady Hambledon persuaded her to drive to the bottom of St. Martha's hill with her father, and then only on condition that she should be allowed to walk home. All the guests started first, and Lady Hambledon was obliged to shut herself into a brougham, every other available carriage being already in use. On the road she passed Grace and Martin, both walking, and was violently hailed by Grace.

"You must give me a lift, Maisie," Mrs. Grantham cried. "It's really too hot to walk."

"I'm thankful every wedding isn't like this," answered Lady Hambledon good-naturedly. "I tried to dissuade Stella, but she was set upon it, and I suppose people have a right to be selfish on their wedding day."

"It never struck me there was any selfishness about it, Maisie," said Grace rather stiffly; she did not like the faintest criticism of Stella.

But the words set her thinking, and she remained silent.

There was a long train of carriages, everyone in the neighborhood feeling a great interest in

Miss Stella Morecombe's marriage. The fact that it took place at the top of a hill, instead of keeping people away, only made them more anxious to come.

Sir Edgar Pierson was there from London—he came up to the window of the brougham just as Grace got in. He assured Lady Hambledon that he considered he had made the match. Grace watched him curiously, wondering whether he said it to avert suspicion, or whether he was trying to convince himself of his own indifference. Ronald, on the other hand, had apparently kept away altogether.

"Maisie," began Grace, as they were rolling along together in the hot stuffy brougham "Do you really think Stella is selfish?"

Lady Hambledon, who had entirely forgotten her own comment, was startled.

"Dear me, no!" she cried. "She only forgets about others sometimes, because she wants her own way. But I do feel annoyed with her now and then," she added.

"Yes?" interrogated Grace.

"Well, it's difficult to put one's finger on it," Lady Hambledon explained. "But you have no idea how easily frightened she is by any little bother or trouble; she always runs away."

Grace was silent again—she was wondering within herself at the courage of men and women,

it was no wonder, she thought, that Stella turned away from even the shadow of sorrow.

"I think perhaps her great happiness will teach her," she said at last, speaking from the experiences of her own heart; for she had learned the significance of words like parting, death, loneliness, long before her sorrow came to her. The deep emotions of life are closely allied, and it is impossible to experience the true force of one without touching another—to love passionately is to understand the grief of parting too—and a heart truly stirred by its own joy, will feel as deeply moved by the grief of others as if it had itself endured a loss. These thoughts cheered Grace, and she felt that perhaps Stella would be taught in this gentle way, with no need for tears.

When they got out of the brougham, the guests had most of them reached the bottom of the hill, and were beginning slowly and laboriously to climb up it. The heat was intense, and the sun beat down on poor frock-coated and top-hatted old gentlemen, and fat, middle-aged ladies in silk gowns, with cruel force.

By the time Stella and her father arrived, after their absolutely silent drive, most of the wedding guests were already halfway up the hill. The two, however, soon overtook Lady Hambledon. She was already out of breath, and her face was

beginning to turn purple. A moment before, she had been profoundly irritated by the necessity of overheating herself, but her love for her niece conquered this feeling when the girl overtook her. Stella had never looked so beautiful—there was not a cloud upon her joy—and her deep blue eyes were as clear as the July sky above their heads. Little random puffs of wind stirred the branches of the birch trees which they passed; the heather under their feet, warmed by the sun, sent up a fragrant scent, and there was that buzzing of bees and distant caroling of birds, which are dominant notes in the symphony of summer.

The little church was very cool and dim, and eyes accustomed to the glare outside could scarcely see at first.

Grace said afterward that she should never forget Martin's expression of loving tenderness as Stella appeared in the doorway. She held no flowers—only her prayer-book, and walked up the aisle on her father's arm with a smile upon her face. There was no levity in her expression, only an overmastering happiness which banished all doubts and fears. She felt that it was more blessed to give than to receive, and came to Martin like a child with no reserve whatever. Grace was deeply moved by the service, not so much because the words recalled her own consecration, as from an intense sympathy with the

happiness and love embodied for her by these two. Something of the eternal youth of the world thrilled her as she watched them pass along the aisle together and disappear down the hill-side. Stella had determined she would walk back to the Grange with Martin, and by common consent everyone waited to give the newly married pair a long start.

Mr. Morecombe moved away and stood with his back to the company, fixedly watching Stella's white dress, flutter among the trees. Lady Hambledon, who had cried copiously during the service, began to laugh, and allowed Fräulein, whose tears were still streaming down her cheeks, to pick up the train of her gray silk gown, and arrange it comfortably for walking down hill.

"It's all very pretty and romantic," said Grace. "But now we've got this horribly hot walk home," and she glanced round with amusement at one or two fat old gentlemen who had hardly recovered from the effects of walking up the hill, and were still wiping their foreheads.

It seemed almost as if Stella and Martin had caught an echo of her laugh, for they both looked back and waved before they disappeared completely out of sight. We must not follow them or try to listen to what they are saying—the trees alone will catch their whispers, and whisper them again to one another.

PART II.

One can see the road from the river's edge ;
Always I look along the road,
For down it something always comes
Towards me, something that doth smile
And something that doth weep,
It is a woman, and a child.
And the weeping woman faster goes
Than doth the smiling child :
And both would give a drink to me,
But the woman doth fetch the water up,
And handeth me the pitcher full,
Quicker than doth the little child.
The pitcher's rim is broken,
Then both go hence—and I only think
Of the woman that weeps—but I forget,
Always forget, the smiling child,
Because it did not still my thirst ;
And every day I go and watch
The road, to see them coming.

CHAPTER I.

"I am happy: yet I feel there's something
Swells my heart, and takes my breath away."

THE sun of a February morning—weak and pale—yet with a peculiar freshness of its own, was shining into a white drawing room in Mayfair. Two figures were standing near a big bay window examining with great care a grand piano which had evidently only just been carried into the room; for on the floor lay the débris of its coverings—straw and paper and string. The piano instead of being an ugly black shiny box suggestive of coffins, was like a beautiful casket, covered with pictures. Stella was breathless with excitement, for this was Martin's present, which had arrived just in time to add the crowning glory to her new room. Martin, for of course he was with her, looked at his wife even more than at the piano, and pointed out the beauty and meaning of each detail of the decoration. Stella examined it with little ripples of delight breaking over her words, responding eagerly to every appeal for admiration. The subject of the painting had been planned by Martin but the artist had exceeded in

wealth of color and detail, and in beauty of treatment, even Martin's most sanguine imaginations.

The frame of the piano was covered with a series of little pictures all illustrating the love of a poet for a star, in one quiet and subdued tone of color, while on the lid was represented the star falling from heaven down to the poet on earth. The painter had suggested a faint resemblance to Martin in the up-turned rapt expression of the young man stretching out his arms toward the shower of light streaming out of the sky above him. The inside of the lid was perhaps the most beautiful part of the whole—it pictured in every variety of rich tint the star transformed into a woman by the touch of earth, and the poet kneeling before her, hardly daring to look up at her now she had come so near to him. The lovely woman had Stella's brilliant coloring, but the artist had imagined an inward radiance which illuminated the face; and he had been unable to eliminate a look of sadness from his conception. Martin often told him that Stella was the incarnation of a spirit of joy, but it was no use.

"She cannot be a star come to earth then," the artist had said, "and I like best to keep the meaning of her name."

"Oh," cried Stella at last, when she had seen it all, "no woman ever had such a present—it holds everything—all your love for me, and all mine for

you, and beautiful pictures, and beautiful music—I don't know how to contain it all in one moment."

"I knew you would love it," said Martin, his eyes shining with pleasure, moved almost to tears by her delight. "I only wish I could have painted it myself."

"Yes," said Stella, "that's the one little piece of imperfection for me too . . . but," she added looking up smiling into Martin's eyes, "you would not have had time then to make love to me, and after all I like that best."

Martin caught her to him, and did not let her speak again for some moments.

Ever since their marriage, they had been ideally and ecstatically happy. No cares came near them, and their honeymoon had lasted nine months instead of as many days. It was spent at first in wanderings over Scotland, and finally in a prolonged visit to Martin's future home. At a distance this visit seemed a gloomy and forbidding duty, but Stella completely won the heart of the lonely, morose old man, Martin's uncle, and was besides initiated into the delights of hunting. She had never been allowed to hunt before, and the excitement of this new game which she could share with her husband, completely possessed her. Martin promised her that the next winter should also be dedicated to hunting, and that he

would buy her more horses, and with this promise she had torn herself away in order to furnish and arrange her home in London.

It is not to be supposed that in this course of time Stella had not met many new people, and made many friends. She was always liked wherever she went, and Martin's heart often swelled with pleasure at the universal tribute which was paid her. Her talent was constantly overlooked and forgotten, for many of the men and women who admired her most cared little for music—to just a few, however, her playing seemed to be the significant element in her attraction.

It is often impossible to describe in detail the subtle change which love and marriage work in a young girl—it is not maturity for that is often not reached, nor is it necessarily a deepening of character. Perhaps it is that the pulses of life beat quicker and stronger in her blood, and she has therefore a closer bond and fellowship with other human beings. Something of this change had crept into Stella's music, and her talent was a greater delight to her than ever before. She found Martin's intense sympathy and encouragement a great stimulus; he made her practice regularly, and besides often helped her by direct suggestion.

She sat down now at the new piano and played with all her soul. Martin felt that he had never

heard her play so well before, and could hardly contain his delight at this inauguration of his piano.

"I must get some of the musicians to hear you," he said enthusiastically. "We will have a party and you shall play unexpectedly, they'll be quite off their heads about you I know."

They had only been in their house a week, and Stella had scarcely as yet begun to see anything of the gay and brilliant life of London. It gave her a thrill of excitement to imagine herself taking a part in the busy pleasure-seeking. What was it all like? What would be her place in it?

"Would you like to go to that ball to-night?" asked Martin, looking at a card on the mantelpiece. "It will be a fine sight, the house is so beautiful."

"Yes, yes," cried Stella. "It's funny to think that I've never been to a ball in my life—there's no doubt about it, I have married much too young," she added with a demure look at Martin.

Martin was slightly preoccupied. The Parliamentary session had just begun, and he was nervous about having to go to the House this evening, and leave Stella alone; he felt sure she had never realized what being the wife of an M. P. entailed.

"What will you do, my darling," he said, "to-night while I am at the House. I shall come back and fetch you about eleven o'clock."

Stella looked up startled—she evidently never had realized. "I shall play on the piano, I suppose," she answered rather stiffly, unaccountably and unreasonably hurt by his readiness to leave her. A woman always shrinks a little when she first emerges from the hot-house of love into the cooler realities, and here was Stella, who had never in all her life before minded being alone, quite upset at the very thought of it.

She was still sitting at the piano, actually looking unhappy.

"You mustn't leave me all alone, Martin," she said vehemently. "I couldn't bear it."

"I'll get Grace to come and dine with you," he answered cheerfully. "You and she always have a great deal to say to each other."

Stella jumped up looking quite angry. "I don't want Grace," she said. "I want you—I think you might stay with me."

Martin laughed at her pouting mouth, and petted her, but remained firm. Finally Stella was quite satisfied, because it was arranged that she should dine at the House with him. She enjoyed this experience enormously—the noise and the clatter—the mysterious summons of the division bell, the sense of watching the great machinery of government at work, stirred her. She felt proud and elated that Martin, her husband, should be a part of the great engine.

"There's nothing very interesting going on," said Martin as they came out of the hot noisy restaurant. "But would you like to go upstairs into the ladies' gallery? I think I can get you a place."

"Yes, please," cried Stella. "And you must speak, Martin."

Martin laughed. "I can't darling, I've nothing to say."

"Then I won't go," said Stella. "I want to hear your voice there. Why shouldn't you speak? It's too silly to say you can't—and you might do it to please me anyway."

Martin was so much amused at this way of treating the grave business of Parliament, that although he made no promises, he took his wayward little wife up into the gallery, and went himself into the House waiting for an opportunity. One or two of his friends asked him afterward what had induced him to ask so foolish a question about so uninteresting a subject—and Martin only shrugged his shoulders and said, "Oh, I don't know—love for the human race perhaps."

Stella however was delighted—she almost clapped her hands—and when Martin came up to fetch her, she only scolded him for not having spoken at greater length, "You can't think how grand it sounded," she said.

All the time she was conscious of an inward elation because she was going to a ball. As she drove home to dress she pitied the people in the streets for not having the same "colored end" to their day—she felt she could hardly have endured to go tamely to bed.

The ball was at one of the biggest houses in London, and every woman who went tried to add to the splendor of the house by wearing her smartest gown and her most shining jewels.

All the fairy stories with their descriptions and images floated through Stella's brain as she passed up the marble staircase, the scent of flowers on the air, and in the distance strains of joyous dance music. She clung to Martin's arm with a mixture of fear and excitement, as if at the last moment she almost dreaded passing from her solitude with him, into the crowded reverberating life surging around her. There was also in her mind an unformed terror lest no one should care for her or look at her, lest she should dance badly and disgrace herself and Martin. But when they at last reached the dancing room, and she saw couples whirling round and heard the buzz of talk and laughter—she could scarcely keep her feet still; Martin put his arm about her waist, and in a moment she was swinging round the room, the joy of movement in her blood, catching sight now and then of an admiring

or a questioning glance — giddy, breathless, delighted.

"Bravo, little girl!" said Martin. "I didn't know you could dance like that."

At this moment Ronald Pierson came up to them, his face was grave, but he bowed low to hide it, and asked her to dance with him. He always went to balls, because it was one of the few forms of exercise in which he excelled. A vague desire to impress Stella possessed him; people had also already begun to notice her peculiar beauty, and were asking for information, and he was pleased to show that he knew her. When the dance was over, he was besieged with questions, and keenly enjoyed describing Stella and declaring that he had known her before she was married. Of such gossamer threads are woven the pleasures of gossamer souls.

Stella was introduced to people until she got quite tired of trying to remember which name fitted which face—she danced the whole time, delighting everyone by her fresh ignorant enjoyment.

By the end of an hour or two, she had won three or four devoted friends who begged her not to go so early and asked when they might come and see her. She came up to Martin when he made a signal to her, with her face flushed.

"I have never enjoyed anything so much in my whole life," she said with great emphasis.

For a second Martin was almost hurt that she should put this sparkling crowded evening before many they had spent together, but he laughed at himself and smiled at her. The only thing he did as they drove home together—meaning more to warn her spirits than to damp them, was to tell her that everyone felt the intoxication of balls when they were young, but that after a while they generally grew tired of them.

"At least," he added, "I am sure this will happen to you, for you have too much in your little head and in your tiny heart to be satisfied for long."

He always teased her about her infinitesimal heart, which he declared was so small he had only once or twice been able to catch a glimpse of it.

"No, I shall never get tired," cried Stella.

As the carriage stopped at their door, one of those strange figures who sell the news of the world for a copper, passed, howling in a hoarse though shrill voice, some words which sounded like "Disaster to British troops."

"What is it?" said Stella shrinking a little.

"Nothing probably," answered Martin quietly. "These men are always taking one in. Stop a moment though," he went on—"it must be past

one o'clock—looks as if some bad news had come in late. Here, my man!" and he bought a copy of a flabby pink evening paper. Stella followed him into the hall, hearing the man's voice fade gradually as he went on down the street, and stood waiting, her heart beating violently. She was frightened, though she could not have said why.

"Good God!" exclaimed Martin, looking up with a startled expression. "Our troops have been cut to pieces. Stella," he added quickly, "isn't your uncle Sir John—in Afghanistan with the 92d?"

Stella turned very white.

"I don't know," she said. "Don't read any more."

She looked so pale and frightened that Martin threw down the paper. "There are no details given," he said. "Don't think about it, my darling child, he is probably quite safe," and all the way upstairs he tried to comfort her. Stella was very ready to be comforted and reassured, and by the time she was undressed, her mind was again moving to the strains of dance music.

CHAPTER II.

"Let Love clasp Grief lest both be drowned."

STELLA was a little late for breakfast next morning, and when she came down to the dining room, she found Martin standing before the table with an open letter in his hand and a very grave expression on his face. When he heard her, he came forward and drew her to him.

"There is very bad news," he said gently. "I have had a letter from Grace who says that Sir John has been killed, and that poor Lady Hambledon is in London almost out of her mind."

He watched his wife's face anxiously, wondering how she would take the announcement. Stella stared at him—she did not seem to understand. "No, no," she said, putting out her hands as if to stop him. "It can't be true." She stood motionless for a moment, and then moved away from him, sat down and began pouring out the tea—her hand shaking terribly.

"You must eat a good breakfast," continued Martin admiring her self-control, "and then I will go with you as far as her house—she has asked for you."

Stella looked up with a startled expression on her face, and shivered slightly.

"I can't go and see her," she said shaking her head.

Martin was bringing her some food, and when she said this, he stopped in surprise.

"Why should I?" she continued, half irritated by his attitude. "I hardly knew Uncle John, and I never cared about him."

"But she has been asking for you," said Martin.

"I can't help it," answered Stella almost angrily. "She oughtn't to ask for me. What is the good of my going to her? What could I say—oh! I can't go, Martin, I can't." She buried her face in her hands, and Martin thought she was crying, but when he went up to her, and softly moved her hands away, he found her cheeks flaming and her eyes unnaturally bright, but no sign of tears.

"I won't go," she added defiantly. Martin's heart bled for her—those who love us understand the contradictions between our words and our emotions—and he knew that Stella was frightened.

"Darling," he said kneeling down beside her—"you must go. Aunt Maisie wants you—can't you understand it?"

"No," cried Stella, "if I were her I should want

to hide myself from everyone—I wouldn't let anyone come near me—what is the use of my going?" she asked again. "I shall have nothing to say to her—nothing." She was trembling all over, and Martin judged it best not to argue with her—he got up and began pouring out her tea, and pressing her to eat.

"Besides," said Stella inconsequently, "are we sure it's really true? I dare say there's been a mistake." She clung to this idea in her mind—it was impossible for her to grasp the fact of Death.

"I'm afraid there is no doubt," answered Martin, "and anyway Lady Hambledon does not think there is."

Stella felt there was to be no appeal, and ate her breakfast in miserable silence—her mind was engaged in disturbed anticipation not so much of her aunt's grief as of the awkwardness of the meeting between them, and her own sense of inadequacy to the occasion. What should she say or do? It had become a habit of her nature to shrink from everything disagreeable, and to be brought face to face with sorrow was quite intolerable to her. She longed to hide herself—to take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the earth—but the inevitable was upon her.

"Now, darling," said Martin when he saw that

she had drunk her tea—"put on your things and I'll call a hansom."

"Why shouldn't we have the carriage?" asked Stella longing for the reprieve of a few moments.

"It takes too long," he answered walking with her to the foot of the stairs.

As she drove through the streets with Martin, it seemed to Stella that every house knew what had happened, the people in the streets were talking of it to each other.

The door of Lady Hambledon's house was opened by a scared looking maid who hardly dared to raise her eyes—there was a close smell about the hall, the pictures on the walls were swathed in brown paper, the staircase was carpetless. No people are so uncomfortable as those who have two houses, and Lady Hambledon who always shut up her London house, if she did not let it, was obliged whenever she came up for a night, to live as it were in a packing case. On this morning the effect seemed especially melancholy, as if only the framework of comfort and happiness were left.

Grace met them on the stairs. She kissed both Martin and Stella silently—and when she felt Stella trembling, turned and kissed her again.

"Maisie is very brave," she whispered, "and she said once: 'I wonder what Stella will feel,' so I thought I would send for you."

"Quite right, of course!" answered Martin and then in an undertone looking toward Stella, "She is terribly upset."

"Poor child, poor child!" said Grace, her whole face lighting up with love, pity and admiration. Suddenly Stella turned and caught hold of her arm.

"Must I see her?" she said in a tone of entreaty. "Is it any good? I don't want to see her."

Grace was quite unprepared for this turn—she looked at Martin.

"Take her in with you," said Martin. "She is frightened."

Grace put her arm round Stella and led her up the stairs—she was surprised at the girl's emotion, and wondered why she had never known that Stella was so fond of her uncle.

"Did you love him very much?" she whispered.

"Who?" asked Stella. "Oh you mean Uncle John. No—I never knew him well at all. Where is Aunt Maisie?"

"She's in her bedroom. She came up yesterday evening and got the first news at six o'clock this morning. I've been with her all night."

When they reached the door, they paused a moment—there was no sound coming from inside, but this silence only terrified Stella the more.

"Go in first, Grace," she whispered. "Perhaps she won't want to see me," her eyes looked like those of a hunted animal.

Grace obeyed her—inwardly she was wondering whether after all Stella had not better keep away, and she went into the room prepared to say nothing about her presence if Lady Hambledon did not ask for her.

The fire had been lit early in the morning and was now almost extinguished by the greater light of the sun, which, though the poor woman had tried to keep it out, streamed in through the drawn blinds and under half-closed shutters, lighting up the untidy room and the huddled figure on the sofa. Lady Hambledon had not curled her fringe—her hair brushed back from her forehead, gave her an unwonted look, and her bright cheerful face was deformed by grief. Her mouth twitched and her eyes were swollen.

She looked up as Grace entered. "Have you brought Stella?" she asked almost eagerly.

"She is outside," answered Grace quietly.

"Stella!" said Lady Hambledon, lifting herself up and raising her voice. "Stella, my child, come in."

There was no response—a chill feeling struck across the hearts of both women; why had she not rushed in and thrown her arms round her

aunt, and tried to smother in love some of the flames of anguish. Grace went outside to fetch her, but found no one on the landing.

"Stella!" she called gently. There was no answer, but someone moved on the stairs above, and then Stella came down.

"Are you sure she wants me," she whispered. "It's no good."

"You must go," said Grace firmly. Lady Hambledon heard their voices outside, and caught an echo of Stella's hesitation. In her troubled state it irritated her.

"Don't force her to come, Grace," she said. "I am all right alone." But Grace had softly pushed Stella into the room, and the girl stood irresolutely in the doorway. The dim light, the untidy room, her aunt's disheveled appearance all seemed to heighten Stella's sense of discomfort and embarrassment. Grief sometimes invests the least impressive figures with a tragic dignity, but there are others which it seems merely to crease and crumple. Poor Lady Hambledon had no dignity left—she was completely crushed and had abandoned herself entirely to her sorrow. Her face looked years older, her hands seemed suddenly quite nerveless.

All this, instead of rousing Stella's pity, created in her a strange unnatural repulsion. She felt she could not go up to her aunt and kiss her, a

new veil had dropped between even their imperfect intercourse.

The sight of Stella seemed to bring a fresh flood of remembrance over Lady Hambledon; she buried her face in her hands, scarcely able to control her sobs enough to speak.

"He was always fond of you, Stella, though he saw you so little," she said. "He always called you his little girl."

Her words were met by the same deadly silence. Stella tried to speak, tried to move forward, but she could not; she felt as if her heart had turned to stone—there was even time for her to wonder at her own callousness, and to resent her sense of insufficiency upon her aunt. Lady Hambledon burst into fresh sobs, bowing her head over the pillows on the sofa.

A photograph of her husband fell down upon the floor. Stella stooped to pick it up, and her aunt thought she was coming to try and comfort her. She rose from the sofa and looked at Stella, but in the younger woman's face she only saw an unreasoning fear, and an embarrassed shrinking. She turned away with a shiver, put out her arms like a blind creature seeking for support, and half walked, half stumbled across the room to the window. Her loneliness pressed upon her intolerably—she had lived so sheltered and surrounded by the devotion of her husband

that even in his absence she had never missed love, but now. . .

As she pushed aside the curtain, and the light streamed in, her misery seemed to rise almost to madness, and Stella's presence became hateful to her.

"Go away!" she said vehemently. "I don't want you—you make me worse. Go away!"

Her voice grew harsh—then querulous.

"Where is Grace?" she asked. "Why does she leave me? She is the only creature who understands."

Stella stood still for a moment—a revulsion of feeling swept over her—a sudden jealousy of Grace and shame for herself—but both these feelings brought back resentment, and she turned rapidly and hurried out of the room, closing the door behind her.

Grace was waiting outside. Stella would not stop, she brushed past quickly only saying,

"Go to her at once—she sent me away," and ran downstairs. Martin was waiting also.

"Take me back," cried Stella. "I knew it would be no good. I told you not to make me come—" and then she burst into hysterical sobbing. He asked her no questions, only tried to soothe her; but it was a long time before he could restore her sufficiently to take her home.

Grace found Lady Hambledon walking up and

down the room in an agitated way. "Maisie, Maisie," she said in her firm gentle voice, "you mustn't do this, you really must not."

Lady Hambledon allowed Grace to fold her in her arms, she clung to her passionately.

"Don't leave me," she said. "Don't let me see anyone. No one understands."

Grace was silent—she knew by instinct what had occurred, but she, like Martin, asked no questions, and hardly allowed her own insight to instruct her.—She smoothed her friend's hair, drew back the window curtains and made her some beef tea—finding her own best comfort in these little services which in great sorrows are all that one human being can render to another. They are very small, very inadequate—it is not possible to illuminate the night with a candle—but in their seeming insignificance lies a healing power. A sense of fellowship in the common things of life is reawakened, and from this little island of mutual firm ground we are sometimes enabled to gaze into the unknown with a larger and a wider hope. Thus it came about that before the day was over, Grace was able to impart to her sorrowing friend some of her own vivid and unswerving faith in the ultimate value and purpose of all sorrow—some of her own radiant hope in the reunion of those who have loved and lost each other here.

CHAPTER III.

"On est quelque fois aussi different de soymemse que des autres."

GRACE GRANTHAM was one of those people who find it impossible not to idealize in undue measure those whom they love. It is an unfortunate temperament, for it continually prepares its own disappointments. There is some injustice in subjecting people to a test of whose very existence they may be unaware, and in placing them on a height too dizzy for their capabilities.

But there are a few people in the world, of whom it is almost impossible to expect too much —so rich in promise and in strength are their natures. Grace had known one or two souls cast in an heroic mold, and unconsciously she had in her thoughts placed Stella with them, robing the young and brilliant creature in all her favorite vestures of courage and tenderness. But these garments were not all woven for Stella yet, and Grace had reluctantly to admit to herself that she had been disappointed. It gave her a pang of sharp pain to acknowledge this, and she would have given worlds to find some real excuse for Stella.

She stayed the night with Lady Hambledon and went to bed herself only after watching the poor exhausted woman fall asleep like a tired child. Full as her heart was of her friend's sorrow, she found time to wonder and wonder about Stella—she recalled many little incidents hardly noticed at the time they occurred—Lady Hambledon's own words at the wedding about Stella's fear; some fragments of her talks with Martin; the girl's thoughtless laughter, in which Grace remembered she had shared, over Sir Edgar Pierson's proposal. But still it was impossible to think of Stella, with her passionate temperament, her wonderful talent, as heartless—there must have been some other cause at work to make her nervous and overstrained.

Grace was driving in a hansom toward her brother's house, making these reflections, when an idea suddenly struck her. "Perhaps, perhaps. . ." And the longer she thought of the deep lines under Stella's eyes, of her morbid fear, the more convinced she became that there was a physical cause for it all.

Martin was out, she learned at the door, and Mrs. Bagehot lying down in the drawing room. She went straight upstairs, not asking if Stella would or would not see her, and opened the door. Stella was not on the sofa—she was sitting before her open piano with her hands lying in-

ertly on her lap. When she saw Grace, she sprang up to meet her with a cry of pleasure, but before she got across the room, she turned suddenly faint and clung to a chair for support. Grace was close to her in a moment.

"What is it, my sweet?" she said. "Here, come to the sofa," and she helped Stella to lie down at full length. "Do you feel ill?" she asked anxiously. "Can I get anything for you?"

Stella had covered her face with her hands, and began to cry gently at first; but the storm seemed to gather strength, and soon her whole frame was shaken with her sobs. Grace hardly knew what to do, she was profoundly moved by this outburst, so new to her in Stella, and she tried to soothe her by stroking her forehead.

"If I could have cried like this yesterday," Stella suddenly exclaimed, "perhaps I could have said something to Aunt Maisie." This reflection was prompted by something very different from the regret and pity which Grace tenderly imagined; it was due to Stella's quick appreciation of Grace's silent criticism. She loved admiration intensely—her friend's whole-hearted praise and belief had been a great delight and stimulus to her. The day before, in Lady Hambledon's house, was the first occasion when Stella had ever felt any detachment in Grace, and the sensa-

tion hurt and galled her. She was acutely conscious that she must have been thought very inadequate, and she had been trying all day, through her real physical discomfort, to explain herself to herself. When Grace arrived, her main desire was to be reinstated in the elder woman's admiration, and she felt that her sudden attack of faintness had helped the cause. It only remained for her to show some recognition of failure, and Grace's allegiance would return. It is not to be supposed that Stella's mind went through this process consciously—she acted merely on the impulse of the moment, scarcely knowing herself what she wanted.

Grace had instantly forgotten all her misgivings; she knelt down beside her.

"Don't cry—don't!" she said, pressing her hands. "You mustn't mind so much: it isn't your fault you are ill and overstrained."

Stella soon felt comforted and soothed and more at peace with herself. She began to ask a few questions about her aunt, and heard some of the meager details which Grace could give her of the disaster.

"There will be no more balls and parties for me!" she said at last. "And I've only been to one."

Grace sympathized with her, and inwardly reflected that if what she surmised were true,

nothing could be better for Stella than the enforced quiet. This thought seemed to hold comfort, and she was also curious.

"I think I know what is the matter with you," she said. "I believe you are going to have a baby."

Stella was still lying full length, her bright hair disarranged and spreading itself over the green cushion. Her cheeks were very pale, and her lips white, but when Grace uttered these words she flushed crimson, and sat up at once, pushing Grace away with her hands.

"Oh no, no, no!" she cried. "That would be too much. I couldn't bear that—what makes you say such a thing."

Grace explained her reasons and asked a few questions to which she got feverish although unwilling answers.

"I have no manner of doubt about it myself, my dear child, and oh I am so glad!" she said at last, trying to kiss her little sister-in-law. But she was totally unaware of the horror, the revolt which was surging in Stella's heart.

"Glad?" she cried, jumping up and beginning to walk up and down the room. "Glad! how can you say such a thing," she stopped still, clenching her fists. "I can't have a baby—I won't have one—I don't want it—I'm sure Martin doesn't want one. Oh! it's a shame, a shame!"

Grace was genuinely shocked, being a childless woman she could imagine no greater gift and treasure than a child, and this revolt of Stella's offended also all her sense of the duty and dignity of resignation to our lot.

She remembered, however, that women's nerves are easily upset.

"Come and sit down and talk about it calmly," she said but Stella would not listen.

"I can't bear it," she cried. "First my fun in the season spoilt by Uncle John's death, and then my hunting in the winter by this odious baby!—Oh! it can't be allowed!" She stamped her foot on the floor. "I shall go to a doctor and make him give me something to prevent it—I'll do anything! I won't have this baby." She was so absorbed in her own vehemence that she did not notice Grace's growing indignation, and began appealing to her eagerly.

"Grace, you must help me, you will help me, I know—come with me now in a cab to a doctor. Don't you see I can't stand it?"—she had caught hold of Grace's hands—who, however, pulled them roughly away.

"I shall do nothing of the sort," she said. "You are very wicked to think of such a thing," and then her tone softened. "Don't be morbid about it, my dearest," she said. "Try and have a little courage. There's nothing so very awful

about it, really." A sudden idea shot through her. "Are you afraid of dying?" she asked, "because——"

Stella threw herself down on the sofa and buried her face in the pillows. Grace bent over her thinking she understood it all now.

"You mustn't be frightened," she whispered, kissing one of Stella's hands. "God will help you, and you will live to love the child."

Stella lifted herself up.

"Go away!—go away!" she cried, her voice almost rising to a scream, and unconsciously imitating her aunt's words the day before. "You don't understand me—you are only cross. Go away!"

At this moment Martin entered the room, and stood in the doorway, dumb with surprise to see his wife with a flushed, angry, tear-stained face, speaking in such tones to his sister. Grace looked up at him helplessly, and Stella, when she caught sight of her husband, ran straight out of the room by another door, without a word.

CHAPTER IV.

"We too have autumns when our leaves
Drop loosely through the dampened air
And all our good seems bound in sheaves
And we stand reaped and bare."

"WHAT on this earth is the matter?" asked Martin.

Grace, whose temper was always easily spurred, could not trust herself to answer—she was indignant at the response her attempted sympathy had met with, and angry with the self-willed rebellion which Stella had exhibited.

"You'd better ask her yourself," she said finally. "I don't understand her at all."

"You haven't been preaching at her, have you?" asked Martin, roused into defense by Grace's tone. Grace disdained to answer his question.

"I'm going away now," she said. "You'd better go and look after her."

Martin sprang upstairs three steps at a time, his heart beating violently—he was beginning to realize a certain nervous excitability in Stella, and he felt that people might easily misunderstand

and irritate her. Stella's door was locked, and it was some moments before he could induce her to open it. When at length she did so, he was shocked and startled by her face.

"Little darling wife!" he cried, folding her in his arms. "What is the matter?"

"Grace was so horrid to me," sobbed out Stella. "She told me I was going to have a baby, and then said I ought to be very thankful."

Martin could not help laughing, but he was quickly stirred by this piece of news.

"Is it true?" he whispered. "It is a very very great happiness if it is."

Stella turned from him abruptly. "You are as bad as Grace," she cried. "Don't you see what it means for me—no more fun now, no hunting next winter—sick all day long—and I shall probably die at the end."

But in spite of her protest, Martin's pleasure both surprised and comforted her. Instinctively she said nothing to him of her appeal to Grace; he was the only person in the world who could ever make her accept the inevitable.

But her self-pity broke out afresh.

"I don't feel as if I could bear it," she cried. "Everything spoilt that I care about!"

"Your fun here would have been spoilt in any event," Martin reminded her gently, "be-

cause of Uncle John's death. In that way, it's rather a lucky moment."

"Take me away somewhere," said Stella. "I can't stay here—it would be so awful in the winter to see you hunting—I should have to sit at home."

Her lips trembled, and Martin dreaded another outburst of sobbing.

"If the Government stays in," he said, "and there isn't a general election, we might go abroad and stay away perhaps till November."

The moment he had said this, he regretted it, for he realized instantly by Stella's expression that she would seize on the idea with avidity—and he did not want to go abroad at all.

"Oh, Martin!" cried Stella sure enough, "I've never been across the Channel in my life. It would be too heavenly!" she was half restored again, for her face changed with marvelous rapidity. "Where shall we go? What shall we do?"

Martin fell in with her mood, it was a delight to him to see her look happy again. An atlas was fetched, and all sorts of different routes discussed; he had now and then to remind her that she must not suggest places too remote from civilization.

By the evening everything was apparently arranged and settled, subject only to his being able to obtain a pair for six months.

Martin was a little uneasy about his words to Grace, and felt that he had been unjust to her; so without saying anything to Stella, he tried to find his sister, on his way to the House of Commons.

Grace was at home—in fact she was waiting for him in her little morning room where he had first told her of his love for Stella. This was not the only time she and Martin had ruffled each other's love, but on each occasion there had been explanations, sometimes tears, and always delightful reconciliations. Grace usually conceded that she had been carried by her enthusiasm or her disapproval further than she meant, and Martin would then admit generously that she was probably quite right, and an amiable discussion would close the matter. But to-day Grace did not feel at all inclined to abase herself —after all, she asked, what had she done but show her utmost sympathy and love, while Stella pushed her away, and Martin asked her a taunting and unkind question. As she thought of it her spirit rose within her, and she determined that when Martin came—as she felt sure he would—she would stand her ground and not apologize first.

But it happened that no one apologized—Martin said nothing—he walked straight into the room with such a look of tender questioning on

his face that her anger melted like snowflakes, and she clung to him also without speaking.

"She was utterly unnerved," said Martin, characteristically enough avoiding all mention of his own words, and passing straight to Stella. He could face a disagreeable thing, but he never dwelt on it a moment longer than was absolutely necessary, and he felt here that Grace bore no rancor.

"Yes, yes! I know," answered Grace uneasily. It was one thing to forgive her brother with his quick reparation, but quite another to forget Stella's repulsion of her—and yet she was fearful of seeming hard. "But she wasn't very good or kind," she continued, and then strangely enough her allayed resentment against Martin's words sprang up again, "and I certainly had not been preaching at her," she concluded.

"Of course not, I quite understand," interrupted Martin. "When I went upstairs I found her in a dreadful state—she was not herself at all, and it took me a very long time to calm her down. Women often are like that in her condition, aren't they?" he asked with an anxious note in his voice.

"They are often unstrung," assented Grace. "But there is something more than this about Stella—she seems to be only half-grown up, and has all the willfulness of a child."

"Of course she has!" cried Martin irritated again. "That's what I love her for—I wouldn't have her different for anything."

"You mustn't say that, Martin," answered Grace gravely. "You oughtn't to want Stella to be always a child. She has ~~got~~ to learn, like all of us, and a little trouble would do her a great deal of good."

"I believe you *want* the child to be unhappy," broke in Martin. His tone was vehement and angry. Decreeing what would be good for this or that person, was an occasional trait in Grace which roused his irritation. Now Grace was one of those people who are always confirmed in their own opinion by opposition. The arguments of others acted like frost on the liquid of her ideas, and congealed them into solid ice. This somewhat elaborate simile holds good still further; for love often made her remelt her decisions. So she went on.

"You are quite wrong, Martin. I don't want Stella to suffer. I love and rejoice in her gayety, but I do not like to see anyone, man or woman, treat those in trouble as Stella treated poor Maisie yesterday, and I do say," she continued, raising her voice to try and stop Martin, who was beginning to interrupt, "I do say that it is wrong to turn away persistently from all the sad side of life—and that Stella had better face it. We are

not meant to walk through the world with our eyes shut to all but our own happiness."

Grace stopped—her face somewhat flushed. Martin was silent for a moment—in his heart he knew his sister was right. Had he not himself said something of the kind to his wife? but Grace forgot Stella's youth—she did not understand her passionate, uncontrolled temperament.

"I thought you loved Stella," he said rather bitterly and unfairly at last. "But don't let us talk about it any more. I dare say you are quite right, and yet I long to keep all the shadows of life away from her." His tone softened, and as the brother and sister looked at each other, the same memory possessed them both—the memory of that terrible day when the light of a noble life—Grace's husband, Martin's friend—had been suddenly extinguished. This grief was perhaps the strongest bond between the two, and the thought of it now came like a resolution of their dissonance.

Grace's eyes filled with tears which did not overflow. She kissed Martin very gently.

"You know I love her," she said. "Don't you?"

Martin kissed her too for answer, and then began telling her of his plans for staying abroad, coming home only a few weeks before the child would be born. Grace did not approve of the scheme.

"You will think me a terrible kill-joy," she cried. "But it really is foolish to run any risks, and this would be a risk. Stella will be quite happy at home."

"Oh, well!" answered Martin. "Nothing is settled yet, really. We shall see," and then he turned the talk on to other things.

Just before he left, he made one more allusion to their differences, saying, "You will come and see Stella, won't you? and just treat her as if nothing had happened—it would be much best to make no allusion to it."

"Certainly," said Grace. "I shall come to-morrow. It will be all right," she added, laughing, with a reassuring little nod.

When he had gone, she looked round her room which had appeared far dustier and uglier ever since she had seen Stella's new house, but never quite so cheerless as it seemed at this moment. What was the matter? She picked up a photograph of Stella, looked at it for a long time, and at length put it down with a sigh. There was no doubt—the first almost romantic love for Stella was changed—she found she could criticise her, could look at her faults calmly, and admit them to herself. But even as she made this discovery, she realized that a new love had sprung up in its place, wiser, clearer, even perhaps stronger.

PART III.

"This jarring dissonance of wayward sounds
Enthralled by law will win its way to peace
And from the bosom of that peace will rise
Concord more fair for discord gone before."

CHAPTER I.

" These movin' things ca'd wives and weans,
Wad move the very hearts o' stanes ! "

MR. MORECOMBE was sitting as usual in his study at Leyton. The large room always kept its general character of somewhat depressing untidiness—though the details were frequently altered according to the stages in its owner's different investigations. At this time there was even more mess than usual, for he was writing a book on birds' eggs, and every table and chair was covered with different specimens. But Mr. Morecombe, who worked usually with a steady methodical energy, could not fix his attention. It was perhaps because the incubator which he kept in a small closet just off his room contained an egg out of which this very morning should emerge a small cormorant. Year after year the cormorants which he had placed on the lake in the Park had been unable to hatch their eggs because of the brittle nature of the shells, which invariably broke under the weight of the hen; no change of food seemed to have any effect, and this year Mr. Morecombe had determined to outwit nature with

an incubator. It would be a very interesting moment for him when the young bird emerged—he was especially concerned with the color of its legs, which should, as everyone knows, be black in a member of the Phalacrocoracidæ family—but which, for some obscure scientific reason, Mr. Morecombe had great hopes would prove red.

Every two or three minutes he got up from his table and moved slowly across the room toward the closet—but why was it that he so constantly stopped still halfway and stood in a listening attitude—as if striving to catch an echo of something which was going on upstairs? Now and then he would hear hurried steps—a door opening; once there was the sound of a voice calling, and he half got up from his chair—but he sat down in it again as if ashamed of himself, and tried to write a few more lines of the chapter.

But it was impossible—he was interrupted once more by the sound of carriage wheels driving up to the door. He got up softly and put his own door ajar, and then returned again to his own table. He could hear Martin's quick step come into the hall, hear him stop to shake hands with the newcomer—hear him say "Thank God you have come—only just in time I believe—we haven't got a nurse, and no one here knows anything about it," and then there was the sound of people running upstairs. Mr. Morecombe sank

back with a sigh of relief—some of his acute anxiety was allayed. He got up again, wandered vaguely round and round the room, and then as if suddenly remembering, he went to the closet, opened the incubator and took out the egg; put his ear down to listen to the pulse of life inside, and felt convinced that in a few minutes more the first crack in the shell would appear. He determined that he would not leave the incubator until this had occurred, and stood watch in hand waiting. But all at once, the still tension of the moment was snapped by a strange and unearthly sound—the cry of a newborn child. There is nothing more ugly and yet more pathetic and stirring than this first wail of a new life which has suddenly sprung into our aching world—one moment there seemed to be no room for a fresh individuality in the crowded arena—the next it is here, breathing, vital, assertive; to be loved, or hated perhaps, in the future, but never to be ignored again.

When Mr. Morecombe heard the cry, he started and a faint color came into his cheeks. It was twenty years ago, just twenty years since he had heard that same sound in almost exactly the same spot. An unwonted excitement possessed him—he knew that someone would rush down soon to tell him the news, and he came into the middle of the room and stood waiting. The time

seemed to have stood still also. Mechanically he glanced at his watch and put it back again in his pocket. Someone was running down the stairs—he could hear the rustle of a woman's skirts, and then a hurried importunate knock at his door.

"Come in!" he said in as calm a tone as he could manage, and Fräulein burst open the door. The tears were streaming down her bright red cheeks, her hair in too excited a state to be kept within bounds. As was usual with her in moments of emotion, she spoke German.

"Ein Sohn! Ein Sohn!" she exclaimed. "Ein grosser Knabe, Stella ist. . ."

"Kindly speak in a language I can understand," said Mr. Morecombe in a freezing tone.

Fräulein's enthusiasm was too warm to feel any chill.

"Pray forgive," she said in her broken English. "Stella has a son!"

It was as if she had spoken after a flourish of trumpets.

At this moment a little faint chirp issued from the incubator, so faint that Fräulein did not hear it.

"Good heavens! The cormorant is out," exclaimed Mr. Morecombe as he hurried toward the closet. Fräulein threw up her hands in horror and disgust—and then indignantly retreated out of the room, just as Mr. Morecombe emerged

with a little struggling living bundle of black down in his hands, blindly trying to get out of his gentle grasp. He went to the window to examine the legs—they were black, inky black. But Mr. Morecombe did not seem to mind, he looked at them in an abstracted way for a long time, but he was obviously thinking of something else.

Upstairs all was now quiet—Stella was lying very still, exhausted and weak—but intensely happy in the relief from pain, and the sense of a great effort and danger passed.

She had been taken ill suddenly—and there had been no nurse and no doctor, everything having been arranged for her confinement to take place in London.

Now it was over, she was well enough to feel very glad; she had not been nearly so frightened as she expected, and her heart was filled with a strange and new emotion.

For as she lay shivering slightly, after the last supreme effort, she was conscious that something was being covered up in a blanket and left at the foot of the bed; and after a little, when she was left alone and at peace, she could see as she looked along the level blanket, this same bundle giving odd convulsive movements. Suddenly to her great surprise, she realized that something else besides the child had been born, and that

was her love for it. She longed at this moment to undo the wrappings and hold the little naked being close to her heart. Martin was kneeling beside the bed, kissing one of her hands, in a passion of love and tenderness. Fräulein was standing outside the door, trembling with excitement—Rose, the old maid, her sternness all smoothed away for the moment, was moving about the room, putting things straight, and heartily wishing that the London nurse who was arriving by the next train, had never been sent for. She determined however that she would wash and dress the baby first, and came up to the bed to fetch it. Stella, Martin and she looked at each other with moist eyes; the hour was fraught with dignity, the day was hallowed.

CHAPTER II.

"One prays. How shall I not love my little son? Do *thou* pray thus—How shall I not be afraid to lose him?"

WE were obliged, in the last chapter, to pass over a long period of Stella's life in silence. There are often stretches in the existence of a human being, when, though much which is important in the future may be wholly growing, yet at the time no change seems to occur either in circumstances or character. Stella and Martin did not go abroad after all, for Martin, made thoroughly uneasy by Grace's warning, went himself to a doctor, and was told by him most emphatically that his wife must not be allowed to jolt over Europe. He took great pains to keep Grace's name out of the whole matter, anxious that Stella should not associate all her troubles with his sister. He was sure that in some unaccountable way she felt that Grace was to blame for the baby, and though nothing more was said between the two women, there was a slight but distinct strain in their relations.

Stella ended by enjoying the rest of her time in London very much indeed—she played a

great deal, and Martin took her to innumerable concerts, or made her come down to the House and dine with him. He took a cottage near London for August and September, where they were both very happy, and finally brought his wife back to London to await events.

Stella had by this time become very nervous and overstrained—she could not bear Martin out of her sight, and wept copious tears if he ever had to go away for a night. The baby was not expected till the end of November, and in October she suddenly declared that she must go down to Leyton. In the back of her mind was the feeling that she might possibly die; and this thought seemed to set alight her love for her old home. She was feverish to be there again—to see all her haunts once more. All had gone well, until the day before their return to London, when Stella was suddenly taken ill. She had been very peaceful at Leyton, her incapacity for all her usual pleasures of riding and walking seemed to have softened her, and Fräulein had not been so happy for a long time. The little governess still reigned at Leyton as lady housekeeper, unable to resist Mr. Morecombe's desire that she should stay on, though only the husk of her former occupation and happiness remained.

Fräulein's delight in the baby was unbounded, and she was never tired of watching its irrespon-

sible movements, and describing all its expressions and feats to Stella who lay watching the bare trees out of her wide window.

Poor Lady Hambledon, who had only just returned from abroad, drove over from the Grange in her widow's weeds, to see Stella. They had scarcely met since her bereavement, and the meeting might have been awkward if the baby had not been there to mediate. As it was, after the first long embrace, into which Stella seemed to put some of the pity of love, the baby occupied thought and speech entirely, and so sympathetically enthusiastic was Aunt Maisie, that Stella clung to her and begged her to come again the next day.

This second visit of Lady Hambledon was the cause of a somewhat pregnant incident. She brought with her a present for Stella—a little antique Tanagra figure which Sir John had once bought in Greece, representing with wonderful grace and tenderness a young mother with a child on her knee. The child was half turning away with little wings outstretched. Stella was enchanted, and made her aunt put it near the bed where she could look at it.

"I shall always have it near me," she explained, "to remind me of the wonderful present God has given me."

But when Lady Hambledon was gone, Martin

came in to see her—and the moment his eyes fell on the little statue, he exclaimed with delight:

"Where did you get this? It's a gem, Stella."

Stella explained, and Martin went on examining it, now and then dilating on the beauty of the workmanship.

"I wonder whether Aunt Maisie knows in the least how valuable it is!" he said. "Why it's the finest Tanagra figure I've ever seen anywhere—so beautifully tender," he went on turning to Stella. "This is the real way to represent death—no hurry, no clinging—the child you see is just lingering for a moment before he turns away, and the mother does not try to hold him back."

Stella turned very white.

"Does it mean that the child died?" she asked.

Martin's back was turned to her, so he did not notice the expression on her face.

"This was probably a sort of commemoration statue," he said, "the Greek form of those awful mourning cards which are still used—the wings on the child mean that he is going to fly away."

Stella had covered her face with her hands.

"Break it!" she cried. "Break it!—I never want to see it again. How could Aunt Maisie bring me such a thing—how could she?"

Martin turned round startled by her tone, and involuntarily he paused for a moment. It had

not struck him before, but indeed Stella was right—there was something ominous in such a present. But his common sense conquered.

"My dear child," he said, putting the figure on her table, "you mustn't be a little goose about it. What possible influence can a statue more than two thousand years old have on our fate? I'll take it away till you are well again, and then you will feel all right."

"Please break it, Martin," cried Stella, her eyes filling with tears. "Please! Please!"

Martin did not answer, but moved away smiling and shaking his head. In a moment Stella reached out her arm, and just managed to sweep the little figure on to the floor. It fell with a crash and broke into a hundred pieces.

She looked at it for one moment with wild eyes, and then burst out crying.

Martin was angry—he could hardly trust himself to speak, but began slowly picking up the pieces, feeling in his heart that the omens were less and less favorable.

For two or three days after, Stella seemed afraid to kiss or caress her baby, but the sense of the vigorous life in his little kicking limbs was too strong for her imaginary terrors, and except for an occasional tighter clasp of the little being to her, she seemed to have forgotten the incident. It was a pretty sight to watch her with her child.

She invented a new language in which to speak to him, and though no one else understood a word of it, the little boy used to coo and answer.

"He does it on purpose, I know," she said to Martin. "Of course he could speak if he liked. He has got heaps to say, if he only would break this portentous silence."

Martin laughed—he was drawing the child's face to please Stella, when she made this remark, and he pointed out to her the strongly marked resemblance which even at this early stage the baby bore its mother.

"There's no trace of me in him," he said. "You and he are alone responsible. I believe you'll forget all about me, now you've got someone nearer your own age to play with," he continued with almost a shade of sadness in his tone.

"Shall you be jealous of him?" inquired Stella, picking up the bundle of flannel and hugging it till it began to cry, and had to be fetched away.

Before Stella was well enough to move up to London, Martin was obliged to leave her to attend to some work he had undertaken, and then Stella, who had been happy and content in her seclusion, grew suddenly restless. She was impatient with the nurse for not allowing her to go out, and indeed became so irritable and unmanageable that the old family doctor came

to the conclusion that she would do herself less harm by going to London than by fretting her soul away at Leyton.

Fräulein was miserable when the day of departure came—the more so that Rose went also—engaged by Stella as nurse for her baby. It was a small consolation, however, to remember that Stella had laughed and said gayly that in a year or two Fräulein must come and begin the creature's education.

CHAPTER III.

"Upon my lap my Soveraigne sits
And leans upon my breast
Meen-time His love mayne-taines my life
And gives my sense her rest
Sing lulla-lulla-by
My little little Boye."

ANYONE who had seen Stella's first and only appearance at a ball on the night of the news of Sir John's death, could have foretold her social career. Ronald Pierson, who was a kind of social barometer, knew instantly that his original instinct about her two years ago at the Grange, had been a true one, and he was not a little proud of his own discernment. Her retirement during the rest of that season and until Parliament met again, only served to heighten the interest people took in her. As soon as she got back to London with the baby, she was besieged by invitations of all kinds, and was amazed herself at her own ready power of making friends. She seemed to have come back to life with a new vigor—her health was perfect, and she delighted in her regained freedom and youth. Martin watched her enjoyment with the keenest pleasure,

her vital joyous spirit had always been her chief charm in his eyes, and it gladdened his spirit to see her growing happier and happier. He realized too that although she loved him with just the same intensity, the outside world was beginning to obtrude more upon her vision, with the result that she grew more independent, and was able both to amuse and occupy herself without him.

Stella's return to London did not for a moment lessen the ardor of her devotion to the baby. In the midst of all her new gayeties, friendships, pursuits, she never forgot to be home in time to see him have his dinner or help to undress him. She was inordinately proud of him, and was convinced that no child had ever before done the things which Richard—for that was his name—accomplished. Deep in the bottom of her heart she was sure that he was a genius, and this idea was not discouraged by Rose, who watched his growth with almost reverential amazement. People talk of familiarity blunting the sense of mystery, but the mystery of birth and growth seems to deepen the closer people are brought into contact with it. Is there ever a mother or a nurse who does not think each new child a marvel, and every stage in its development a miracle? Rose who had brought up several children, declared that she had never seen a

child so intelligent as Richard, and Stella absorbed this welcome news without hesitation. She used to call Rose the baby's grand-nurse, and declared that he must be taught to call her Grannan. Rose had not been so happy since Stella herself was a child, her heart which had grown stiff in the years when no baby hands had touched it, expanded, and the devotion of the young mother helped the old nurse to feel that she had got her original child back again.

Stella who was never able to conceal anything she felt, amused people by her naïvely expressed adoration of both her husband and baby, and it was a new experience to many to find this devotion side by side with the most vivid and intense enjoyment of every form of life.

Grace Grantham used to say that no two people in the world had ever such fun together as Martin and Stella; their house was full all day of echoing laughter. Stella's love for the child had won Grace's heart anew, and over his little cradle a fresh bond had been woven.

Thus there was no cloud upon the sky.

But neither the blue skies nor the clouds of our lives are formed merely by our circumstances.

In the background of some lives the sun is always shining, whatever storms may pass overhead; there are others with a dark and lowering horizon ever seen and ever drawn nearer to. And again

there are lives in which every circumstance of happiness is present, but the alchemy of character changes all into failure or sorrow.

In Stella's existence there was always the one weakness—her revolt against sorrow, her attempt to ignore it; she was like someone standing in the full glare of sunlight, who resented the presence of any shadow. But if there are to be no shadows, there must be no trees, no sheltering homes, no loved figures to cast them, and we must stand alone in a wide desert. Stella had been taught to love, and with love, greater fear had come—but she had never yet sounded the unimaginable depths of a love which braves and survives sorrow, and possesses a spiritual courage that is almost sublime.

One evening early in July, Stella was kneeling on the floor in the nursery, playing with the baby, who sat placidly in front of her, with his blue eyes ready to smile at the very next thing his mother did. The bond between the two was very close, and there was no doubt that Richard looked upon his mother as the great element of fun in his life. He was only nine months old, but Stella declared that he had all the stored sense of humor which experience gives. Babyhood is generally a solemn period, unlit by smiles; the child seems oppressed with his lot, and has no courage. Then gradually as he grows accus-

tomed to this world, and perhaps forgets about the climate from which he came, the comedy of our tragedy reveals itself to him. But there was certainly an unusual brightness and gayety about little Richard, who seemed to feel the whole of his existence a joke. He was laughing now as Stella covered her face for a moment, and then said "peep-bo," and they were both startled by a knock at the door, followed by the footman's face.

"Mr. Pierson is in the drawing room, ma'am and particularly wishes to speak to you. He says he will only keep you a few minutes," and the footman smiled benignly at the little group on the floor, as he made this statement.

"I'll be down directly, Frederick," said Stella, and proceeded to pick her baby up, and cover him with kisses, which he received in a somewhat grudging spirit.

She was pleased to see Ronald; he always offered her a kind of respectful homage which flattered and pleased her, and she knew that he was inclined to admire everything she did or said. Music was a great link between them, and Ronald always knew how to make her play her best. This morning he was rather nervous, for he had come to ask a favor, and he was not quite sure whether she would accede to his request; or rather perhaps whether Martin would allow her

to do so. Ronald, like many men of his caliber and pursuits, was mildly philanthropic, and was constantly occupied in getting up charity concerts and entertainments. He had hit this time upon the idea of giving a variety entertainment entirely conducted by amateurs. He was going to hire a big hall, and depend upon the friends of all the various performers to fill it. Now, although he had procured the services of little Miss Ellen, who danced so divinely, and of Sir George Baden, the famous singer of music-hall songs, to say nothing of one or two other well-known amateur actors and actresses, he still felt that his programme needed a certain distinction. Everyone was talking about the lovely Mrs. Bagehot, and he was sure that her name upon the advertisements would add a great luster to his venture. But it would not be enough merely to ask her to play—he wanted her to act a kind of monologue which he himself proposed to write, in which her playing would be incidentally introduced.

"It won't be at all difficult," Ronald explained enthusiastically. "I haven't quite thought out my little idea yet, but I thought you might perhaps be someone who has got to play while a crisis is going on in her life—you know the sort of thing—one moment it could seem to be going all wrong—which you could show in your playing," and Ronald jumped up and began playing some

chords on the piano, laughing at himself as he did so, but cleverly managing to give the impression by broken chords, of great agitation.

Stella laughed. "It's all very well," she said, "but I can't imagine anything much more difficult—and it's so vague too."

"I'm sure you and I can work out something together," cried Ronald, "the whole performance is to be acting, and yet I must somehow get you and your playing into it. The whole thing depends upon you—everybody will be wild to come if they see your name—*dear* Mrs. Bagehot, you will help me, won't you?"

Ronald had got up and, standing close to Stella, he fingered a long end of ribbon which hung from her waist, half familiarly, half as a supplicant.

"Of course I will, if you can think of anything," said Stella with a smile of pleasure, "I don't believe Martin would mind, and it would be great fun."

Ronald was enchanted. He foresaw, besides the success of his scheme, a prospect of meetings and intimate association with Stella, and he vowed that before the evening he would light upon some notion.

"You know you are dining with us to-morrow night," he said, "and then we can talk it over. You can't imagine how grateful I am to you—I shall never forget it, and you will make so much

money for my poor dear factory girls. I shall tell them it was chiefly you," and with a characteristic little jerking gesture with his thumb, Ronald stopped breathless.

"That is not quite fair to the other performers, it seems to me," said Stella lightly. "I would go anywhere myself to see Miss Ellen dance."

"Oh yes, she is clever, isn't she?" Ronald answered. "But lots of people are clever and very few have genius," and he took Stella's hand in his own and gave it a slight pressure.

As soon as he was gone, Stella flew upstairs to the baby again—he was just being lifted out of his diminutive bath and rolled up in a big towel—she kissed his little damp legs, and let him twist his fingers in her hair, laughing and cooing at him all the time.

"Don't excite him too much, Miss Stella please," said Rose, "he won't go to sleep for a long time if you play with him too late."

Stella laughed, and said she had never received such a compliment in her life.

"Why I couldn't keep Mr. Bagehot awake for a moment Rose, however witty I was," she said. At this moment Martin appeared in the doorway.

"Don't you believe her, Rose," he exclaimed. "I often listen to her for hours."

"Oh, Martin!" cried Stella jumping up. "Just fancy what happened,—Mr. Pierson wants me to

play in a great big public hall," and then she told him the whole story.

"Well, I don't mind," said Martin putting his arm round her waist, and leading her downstairs, "as long as you really do it well. We can't have a failure, and you must distinguish yourself."

CHAPTER IV.

"The earth hath bubbles as the water has
And these are of them."

STELLA had grown quite accustomed to dining out alone without Martin. He was a very conscientious, or rather perhaps ambitious, member, and rarely missed a division. But now and then he would come straight from the House for dinner, and go back immediately afterward, and he intended to do so on this evening. He always remembered that Sir Edgar had proposed to Stella, and Ronald obviously had been on the verge of doing so too, and this memory bred in him, not so much jealousy, as a kind of jealous interest. He liked to see what was going on.

When he entered Sir Edgar's somewhat stiff and besatined drawing room, he saw Stella sitting on a sofa between Grace and Ronald. Ronald seemed to be explaining something volubly, and Grace's fresh clear laugh came across the room.

"What are you laughing at?" exclaimed Martin, longing to escape from greeting all the people he knew.

Stella put her finger on her mouth, and said

"Sh!" glancing round with an amused expression, and then up at Martin with her eyes twinkling.

"Mr. Ronald has been describing all the different performances which these people are going to do for him, including mine, which Grace feels is the most ridiculous of all."

"No, I don't!" said Grace still laughing. "Only Mr. Pierson declared that Stella was to play something on the piano which would let the audience know at once that her lover was escaping down the water pipe."

"Oh, Mrs. Grantham, how can you?" interposed Ronald. "Isn't she unfair Mrs. Bagehot?"

"Yes, she always is," laughed Stella, giving her sister-in-law a furtive kiss to atone for the statement.

Sir Edgar at this point began to lead the way downstairs with Lady Frome, mother of Miss Ellen the dancer; a stern hard-featured woman with gray hair combed up high off her forehead, a long sharp face and a well-bred air and bearing. Lady Frome's voice was a high falsetto, and she used its utmost power in declaring her opinions. She had all her life longed for what is called social success, and would have professed any belief or adopted any code to secure it. But in her youth her efforts had been unavailing, and she was conscious, although she and her husband

dined out every night, that no one really cared to see them, and that it was only because of their ceaseless entertaining that they got asked at all. Then two things happened—Lord Frome died and her daughter grew up. Ellen was mignonne very small, very silly, very graceful, and she danced divinely. Twenty years before, Lady Frome would sooner have died than allow any daughter of hers to dance in public, but then that was twenty years ago. Now things were altered. Many people thought it very clever of Lady Frome to be so young and modern and unprejudiced, others laughed, others again, of her own generation, disapproved, but all joined in inviting her and Ellen to their choicest parties. She always accompanied her daughter, for she would never let her go out alone, or dance unchaperoned.

"One must draw the line somewhere," she said and that was where she drew it. It was a very convenient place for Lady Frome.

Sir Edgar's dinner party had been got up entirely for the purpose of talking over the great variety entertainment, and possibly rehearsing one or two items in the programme. So there were present Sir George Baden, a short, thin, half-grown looking little man with an eye-glass in one eye and an indescribably humorous expression in the other, and Miss Ellen dressed in what she

called her rainbow—a many-colored gauze garment very convenient to dance in, as she explained eagerly to Ronald who was well placed between her and Stella. Mr. and Mrs. Heskett were also of the party—Mrs. Heskett a young fair-haired woman who sang extremely well—her husband considerably older than herself, who was her *impresario*. He trained and taught and advertised her, and enjoyed in return the *entrée* to many houses which nothing but his wife's talent would have given him. There were one or two other distinguished amateurs, whom it is perhaps hardly worth while to describe. Besides these, were one or two women who, like Stella, could talk—as the phrase goes, Grace, and a curious sleepy-eyed woman—Mrs. Carrington, who now and then woke up and made a remark which some people thought clever, and some absurd, but which undoubtedly possessed the power of setting other tongues wagging.

"I don't like Jewish music of any sort," she said suddenly to Ronald across the table, overhearing his comments to Stella on some concert, and being bored by Mr. Heskett on her right. "To me there's always a certain tone about it, which I don't like. I can always recognize it at once."

"You'll have to exclude a great deal then," said Stella eagerly. "Why Beethoven and Schubert and Bach. . ."

"Ah," said Mrs. Carrington who at her last country house visit had looked up the whole subject in an encyclopedia, "that's what everybody says, but it isn't true is it Mr. Ronald? They are not Jews."

Ronald evaded the question, either from ignorance or from a desire to help out Stella.

"What about Mèndelssohn?" he asked.

"I like some Mendelssohn," answered Mrs. Carrington a little embarrassed, "but as a rule I think his big things are a little disappointing. He never argues you know — never." And she sank back feeling she had said something clever.

This was unanswerable; Stella turned to Ronald with a gleam in her eyes, but he was talking to his neighbor, and then to Sir George Baden.

"I like logical music, don't you?" he said in a low voice interrupted by coughs—"something which is worthy of all the brilliant talk around us?"

But Ronald would not allow Stella to speak to anyone else, and immediately recaptured her attention by some new suggestion about her performance. Grace, who was sitting opposite, watched them with some surprise. They seemed very intimate. Was it possible that Stella was seeing too much of him and flirting with him?

She looked at Sir Edgar, and interrupted an uneasy glance at his son, and then she put the thought away, and wondered whether Sir Edgar still cared for Stella. He certainly watched her a great deal, and was always ready to laugh at any of her sallies. She was in her usual spirits, and kept up a running fire of chaff with Ronald and Sir George, occasionally stopping to bait Mrs. Carrington opposite.

Stella's charm in conversation did not arise from any special quickness or wit—her delicate flower-like fancy hardly ever unfolded itself in public—but there was so much frank enjoyment in her laugh, such a swing of youth and delight in her rapid gestures, that in her company everyone seemed to enjoy themselves. She could place herself instantly on a platform of good fellowship with almost anyone, and had the power of imposing her own gayety upon others.

Martin, who was not far off, had Lady Frome next him. She always declared that Martin was her favorite young man, and seemed half inclined to believe that he was somewhat in love with her. This belief was not perhaps entirely created by her vanity, for Martin had long ago saved his intercourse with her from being intolerably tedious, by pretending to flirt with her. One of his greatest amusements in life was to

play upon the weaknesses and follies of others, although always in a curiously tolerant spirit, and he really managed in this way to be quite pleased when he found himself in Lady Frome's society.

This evening, though he appeared to be hanging on every word which came from her lips, he was really listening to the talk which went on round his wife.

"The more your attention wanders," he had once explained to Stella, "the more absorbed should your expression become," and accordingly he gazed into Lady Frome's eyes with penetrating ardor. But Stella knew very well that he was listening, and she kept making efforts to draw him into the conversation.

"Martin," she said at last, "don't I always tell you it's disgusting to spend so much money on food. Mr. Ronald has been telling me about a dinner party at the Paragon where the asparagus alone cost eight pounds."

Lady Frome threw up her hands in horror, though she had often fished for invitations to this same restaurant.

"You men," she said, "are really disgustingly greedy."

"Well," said Martin, "one must dine somewhere."

Ronald here intervened, "It's awful when one

thinks of the suffering going on, one feels one ought not to have anything." There was a look of real distress upon his face as he put the breast of a quail into his mouth.

Martin's eyes twinkled. "It doesn't do to think too much about it," he said, "one might become morbid: Now you, dear Lady Frome, if you once took up the subject would hardly allow yourself a crust, I know."

Lady Frome was not altogether pleased; she did not quite understand.

"Oh, well," she said vaguely, "I don't go in for any of these newfangled socialistic ideas."

After dinner, Miss Ellen was asked to describe what she meant to do at the variety entertainment. "A dance arranged specially for *me*," she said, "by D'Aubigny the great dancer. I am to be a little child," she explained, "in a delicious *Bébé* sort of frock, and I am to dance round a table with a big jam-pot on it—something like this," and she pirouetted round the room with charming infantine grace.

"Oh, Mrs. Bagehot!" cried Ronald. "Do play for her, and let us see the whole thing. *Please* Miss Ellen."

But Miss Ellen would not.

"I don't know the dance yet," she said, "and I am not going to spoil the effect by doing it badly. There are all sorts of things—I've got to

hide under the table when I hear someone coming—I must know it better."

"What is Mrs. Bagehot herself going to do for you?" asked Sir Edgar—standing close beside Stella. He always affected to treat her as if she were his daughter, and was constantly telling her what an impression she made upon his friends.

"Oh," said Ronald, "we've got hold of an idea, but it isn't worked out yet; now if Mrs. Bagehot would only try and improvise something, we might get on a bit."

Stella's face flushed—in truth she felt as if she could do it, but yet was not sure of herself.

"Oh, do try—do!" came from several voices.

Ronald looked at her pleadingly, and Sir Edgar patted her hand, he was rather at a loss—for Miss Ellen's refusal to dance and Sir George's evident cold, had upset his evening's entertainment.

"Will you all go on talking then?" said Stella. "I must go and consult with Mr. Ronald for a minute, and you must remember that this is really only an experiment."

Martin had by this time gone back to the House, and Grace felt somewhat nervous. Would Stella make a failure of it? Ronald and she were, besides, a very long time out of the room, and the same uncomfortable suspicion

returned to her mind. She tried to talk to Sir Edgar, but he seemed preoccupied too. The sense of waiting had cast a gloom over the company—everyone, even Miss Ellen, was talking in low whispers—the subdued tones now and then crossed by the sharp dry cough belonging to Sir George Baden's cold.

At last Ronald came back. He arranged a free space round the piano, and asked his guests to sit in a row before it.

"I must explain," he said, "as we have no programme. The action takes place in Paris in the time of the Revolution."

After a short pause, Stella entered through a French window which opened into a conservatory. She was evidently in great agitation, and kept stopping to listen anxiously, as she closed the window carefully behind her. She had twisted up her hair differently, and wore a big miniature hung round her neck by a black ribbon—a change of dress which Ronald had suggested. She explained in a few vivid and rapid sentences, that her lover was hidden in the balcony, and had ~~got~~ to make his escape into the street, and if possible out of Paris. Her father—a red Republican, would shoot him, or get him arrested in a moment, if he discovered his presence.

And at this she went to the piano.

She must play at once, she said—her father was training her as a professional, and if she did not begin practicing at the right moment, or left off for more than a second, he would come running up the stairs to see what she was doing. Once in the room, he might discover everything; so she began playing feverishly and hurriedly.

The audience were spell-bound. Stella had real talent for acting, and was completely carried away by her rôle. Suddenly she started as if she heard a noise, and, unable to resist any longer, ran to the window. "Merciful Heaven!" her lover was just beginning to climb down—his foot seemed to be slipping; would he fall? No! thank God—he had saved himself! Then, remembering in terror that her father might come upstairs if he heard no sound, she rushed to the piano once more and began playing again, leaving the window open.

After a moment one or two shots were heard —contrived somehow by Ronald behind the door, and her playing stopped in a terrified crash. She apparently did not dare to move, but sat dazed and horrified, hiding her face and moaning—then with a start she recollected herself—she stood up trying to look out of the window, with one hand playing all the time. But it was impossible, and she could only strike the

same note over and over again, straining her ears to catch the faintest sound.

Absurd as it looks written down, the intensity of anxiety in her face made the reiteration of one note seem almost tragic. But gradually, as nothing further happened, she seemed to recover herself, sank back in her chair, and her fingers wandered into a passionate and yearning melody full of the sorrow and misery of parting. All at once a rolled up ball of paper comes through the window and falls on to the piano. It must be a letter!

She smooths it out rapidly and reads that he is safe—unhurt, he loves her always and asks her never to forget him. She hides the precious letter in her gown, and once more with a laughing exclamation remembers her music, and begins playing; this time in the most joyous triumphant strains ending in thundering and vibrating chords.

When Stella stopped, and got up shyly, there was a perceptible pause for a moment, and then a storm of applause. Everyone, including Grace, who came up and kissed her, just as she had done at the Grange, when they first met, had listened with breathless interest and surprise, and they all crowded round her with a chorus of congratulations.

"I must go at once and write down every bit

I can remember," cried Ronald enthusiastically. "I am so afraid lest you should never do it again so well. It was simply wonderful."

Stella stood among them, flushed and pleased; Sir Edgar almost had tears in his eyes as he thanked her, and Grace was obviously much moved. "Was she really so very clever?" she wondered. She had never realized that she could act, before. Her one regret was that Martin had not witnessed her triumph.

"You must come to-morrow and tell Martin all about it," she whispered to Grace, and all the way home she went over every detail of the evening in her mind, and recalled again the delight which she herself had felt in her rôle, and the strange thrill of the sensations that she had stirred and excited in her audience.

CHAPTER V.

"The river went weeping, weeping,
Ah me! how it did weep!
But I would never heed it
The weeping of the river,
Whilst thou wert at my breast.
The stars, poor stars were weeping
But I would not hear their weeping
Whilst yet I heard thy voice."

THE time slipped by, its pace hastened for Stella by every kind of amusement and pleasure. In these days she saw little of Grace, who continued her round of philanthropic work undisturbed by the noisy life about her, and Martin also was becoming more and more engrossed in the claims of political life. Stella was thus thrown a good deal upon her own resources, and was beginning to find them amply sufficient. She was constantly to be seen with the two Piersons, who were proud of her social success, and spoke of her always as if she were their *protégé*—their property. But Stella's friends were more apt to speak of them as her property, and smiled whenever Sir Edgar or Ronald began to circle in flights of conversation which invariably draw nearer and nearer to Stella.

Ronald Pierson's projected entertainment occupied a great deal of Stella's time and energy, and caused her also to see more of the young man than might otherwise have been possible. There was a certain excitement to her in their intercourse, though she was innocent of any attempt to involve Ronald further in the meshes of a hopeless attachment to herself—she merely allowed events to take what course they wished. Ronald knew very well that Stella was devoted heart and soul to her husband and her baby, and that she had no space for anyone else, but he was content to wait in her antechamber. Stella was indeed entirely absorbed by the new affections which had come into her life, and her love for the baby was a new experience, because there was no mixture of anything like companionship, or interest, or jealousy or pride—it was simply love. Martin, of course, appealed to many sides of her nature, but the baby could only live in her heart. He was, as I have said, nine months old and precocious even for that age, which is perhaps the most precocious time in the life of a human being. How does a baby manage to adjust himself to the world, and why is he not bewildered and terrified? Every object is new to him, every face, every sound, but he accepts it all without remonstrance, listens to what he cannot understand, and endures patiently.

Added to all this, it often seems as if a child still preserved some qualities of sense belonging to a different existence, and both sees and hears more than is granted to a full-grown being. Stella's little baby was unusually bright, eager to learn about the world: but he also was haunted by strange influences.

She used to long with almost passionate intensity for him to speak and tell her what he thought, and sometimes she would put her head down upon his little soft downy curls, and strive to enter into his consciousness—feel what he felt, see what he saw. But the gulf between them was too wide, and even her love could not bridge it.

She was still inordinately proud of her baby, and could hardly resist taking him about with her or fetching him down to the drawing room whenever any of her friends expressed the faintest curiosity to see him. Rose always disapproved of these excursions: "It isn't good for him, Miss Stella," she would say. "He's too clever for it, he takes too much notice."

But Stella only laughed and delighted in the way his bright eyes would wander all over the room and finally fasten themselves with a fascinated stare on a lamp or the bright reflection in a looking glass. She played the piano to him with great vigor, in order, as she said, to make him musical, and took little heed of the frightened

expression which sometimes crossed his face. It was a great pleasure also to excite him and make him laugh, for a baby's laugh is very infectious. One morning she instituted a kind of dance which she called a "Valse Capricieuse," and which began by a pas seul on her part, while she approached the baby sitting on the floor, and a wild dipping and turning dance when she picked him up. The two children certainly made a lovely picture: Stella in a long white muslin garment which she was fond of wearing, swaying and turning her graceful body: the baby laughing, and holding up his arms. This game began when a German band invaded the street. "It's the only way I can manage to endure the noise," she explained to Rose, who was standing by feeling rather nervous. At this moment Martin appeared in the doorway of the nursery with a letter in his hand.

"Oh, Martin!" cried Stella, "You are just in time—now watch!" and off she went again, the baby laughing with delight, and she turned at last breathlessly into her husband's outstretched arms. The baby was frightened at this, and began to cry, so Rose had to take him away and comfort him, while Stella put her arm through Martin's and led him downstairs.

"I came up to give you this letter," said Martin carelessly, "it's from Aunt Maisie."

Stella standing on the landing outside the drawing-room door, undid the envelope, and began reading it while Martin looked over her shoulder. This was the letter.

DEAREST STELLA: I have got a bad piece of news for you—poor Fräulein was taken suddenly ill three days ago; I did not write before, not wishing to frighten you. Dr. Hale does not know what is the matter, but she has very high fever, and we are all most anxious. Dr. Hale is very much puzzled—he thought it might be scarlet fever, but she had no rash. She keeps on moaning and asking for you—and this morning he said he wished you could come and see her, it might soothe her. She is quite conscious and would know you. If you think of coming let me know the train. Martin will advise you what to do: I must go over to Leyton now. Good-by, my dear child,

Your affectionate

AUNT MAISIE.

P. S.—Your father seems very anxious you should come.

Stella let her hands drop down in dismay. The first thought which flashed through her mind was that she ought to be starting now for a rehearsal of her monologue with the great actor Bevington, who had volunteered to give her some hints; the second, that Grace would say she ought to go to Leyton at once.

"What am I to do, Martin?" she said.

Martin was reading the letter through again, his face very grave.

"I can't possibly let you go down till we know what the illness is," he said decidedly. "I'm not going to have you run an unnecessary risk of scarlet fever or smallpox. And there's the baby to think of."

Stella's relief was inexpressible—she had not expected Martin to take this line, remembering his attitude when her uncle was killed, and the sense that, at any rate for the moment, she was absolved from going, gave her time to feel sorry about her governess.

"Poor, poor Fräulein!" she said. "Oh, Martin, she won't die, will she?"

Martin always took a cheerful view.

"I hope not, I'm sure. Poor woman!" he said. "But don't worry about it till we hear more. I'm going out now, and I'll send a telegram to Lady Hambledon saying that you shall go as soon as the illness has declared itself—that is, of course, if it isn't infectious. It's obvious from this letter, she didn't in the least expect you to go—don't worry about it too much, my darling," he added, kissing her gently. "It won't do any good."

Stella dismissed the fear that Fräulein's illness would prove to be infectious, and went off to her rehearsal with an easy heart.

Bevington was very complimentary, and said there was little he could teach her—he was a fat

heavy looking man off the stage, though on it he could invest almost any part with originality and charm.

Stella went through her performance with great nervousness, and, in spite of his prolonged applause, came away uncertain of the exact meaning of the above remark.

She was dining with Lady Frome that evening, who with her social lion-hunting instincts, had instantly annexed her. Stella was looking forward to the evening with great pleasure, for Lady Frome was giving a large musical party, and had engaged one or two prominent artists to perform. Stella with her devotion to music would have gone anywhere to hear a good concert, but this was not the whole secret of her inward excitement. Lady Frome had made her promise to play, though Stella demurred at the compliment of being placed on a level with Mme. Belinski, the new pianist.

"My dear," Lady Frome said with characteristic tactlessness, "they won't care half so much for Belinski as for you—they'll all be delighted, whatever you do; you'll be judged from quite a different standpoint." Stella laughed, but inwardly she determined that whatever standpoint she was judged from, she would play well enough to deserve any praise. She practiced one of the Chopin studies with great vigor, after consulting

Martin, who chose this composer as the one best suited to her wayward temperament.

After superintending the evening bath of the baby—splashing water at him, and covering him with kisses, she ran downstairs to play over her piece once more. The day before, she had been very depressed about it—her fingers seemed to have got stiff, and though she could manage the difficult passages in a sort of spurt, her fingers often stumbled over the easy ones. This evening, however, all went well, she felt renewed confidence in her powers, and she played on and on, longing for Martin to come in and help her by his criticism. But he had warned her that he might quite possibly be kept late at the House, and that she must therefore go to the dinner without him, and make his excuses as well as she could.

"But the Government shall be defeated, before I will miss hearing you play!" he said just as he went out.

At last Stella went up to dress. Martin had insisted upon her having a new gown for this occasion, and she was looking forward to his approval. The gown was a dexterous combination of white and gold—thin floating white and pale fine threads of gold.

"I think it's very artistic," Stella was saying to her maid, twisting and turning herself in front of

the long glass. "It's like," and she hesitated, "like,—oh good gracious Emma what is it like?"

"I'm sure I don't know, ma'am," said Emma—a mild conventional looking woman.

"It's like some wonderful flower, I think," said Stella.

"Very likely, ma'am," said Emma. "There's someone knocking at the door, ma'am."

Emma brought back a telegram in her hand.

"Mrs. Bagehot!" read Stella. "What can it be?" and then a sudden recollection of Fräulein and her illness overwhelmed her. She stood with the telegram in her hand, not daring to open it. But it occurred to her that the message might be from Martin, and with trembling fingers she slowly undid the envelope.

Please come at once [the telegram ran]. Fräulein not expected to live. Illness not infectious.

HAMBLEDON.

A sudden horror overcame Stella, and she let the paper fall fluttering down on to the floor.

What was she to do? Go that very moment, take off her new gown, miss the party, the playing, go alone—oh! it was impossible! She stooped and picked up the telegram. "Fräulein not expected to live." Perhaps there was no immediate danger. She could not go now, this minute, in her low gown, without seeing Martin

or making any arrangements. It was impossible. Her imagination called up for her in a moment a vision of Fräulein lying in bed, of the silent hush of the room—her father's face—Aunt Maisie's.

She shuddered slightly. Why had they sent for her? what was the good of it? Why should she be made to see these horrible things? Why should Fräulein die? The recollection of her uncle's death, and her own behavior then, came across her. Of course, she assured herself instantly, of course she would go next morning if Fräulein was no better. She tucked the telegram into her dress, and finding it was already late, decided to go straight to the dinner and send the carriage back for Martin, in case he came home to dress. In her mind no plan was formulated—she should see Martin and tell him, and he would decide. In the meantime she would go.

Lady Frome lived quite close by, so that Stella hardly had time to think, only to feel restless and uneasy as she drove there. She made Martin's excuses very prettily, looked round the elaborate room, furnished in the most recent old French style, and saw many of her friends smiling at her. The recollection of Fräulein's illness, of the urgent summons she had received, faded under the brilliant glare of the candles. The diamonds on her neck sparkled, her eyes gleamed in response to other eyes—her gay little laugh

began to ripple out of her lips. No one would have guessed that she had a message of Death in her gown, no one could have divined that the longing of a dying woman was knocking vainly at her heart.

Martin arrived very late—he had not even had time to dress, and found a place left vacant for him beside his hostess. He looked all round the table in search of Stella, and nodded and smiled approval of the new gown. She looked prettier to-night than he had ever seen her, he thought, and wondered if it was the excitement of playing for the first time to a large audience which had put the extra tint of color into her cheeks and sparkle in her eyes.

Toward the end of dinner, he was explaining to Lady Frome the position of affairs in the House, making meaning allusions to his impatience at being kept there on this evening of all evenings, when his remarks were interrupted by the footman handing a telegram to Lady Frome, which she opened at once. Released for the moment, he naturally turned his eyes in Stella's direction. She had Ronald Pierson on one side of her and a man unknown to Martin on the other; but she was not talking to either of them. Her eyes were fixed upon Lady Frome with an expression of dread and anxiety.

Lady Frome made a little exclamation of an-

noyance, and handed the telegram to Martin for him to read, at which Stella's eyes grew large with fear, and she leant forward watching her husband's face.

Martin handed back the pink paper, but looked first at Stella, and, surprised by her interest, lifted his eyebrows at her. He could not imagine what was agitating Stella: the telegram was only from one of the singers Lady Frome had engaged, saying she could not come. But Stella blushing a little, turned away and began to talk eagerly to Ronald: the sight of the telegram had terrified her. Quite natural events assume a serious significance when our minds are possessed with one idea, and she had an unreasoning fear as she saw Lady Frome open the yellow envelope, and still more when she handed it to Martin, that the message would have something to do with her and Fräulein. The relief was great, but her pleasure for the moment was gone. Was it not perhaps dreadful of her to sit here enjoying herself? Ought she not to get up at once and speak to Martin? She had meant to tell him as soon as he arrived; but it was not her fault after all that he had come so late and had not even spoken to her. She must wait now till after dinner; but she would tell him then at once—she would beckon to him to come and speak to her.

But when the moment came, her resolution

or her courage failed her. Martin was talking eagerly to someone and did not even look at her, and by putting off the evil moment, she had already made it more evil and added to her selfish hesitation an hour spent in laughter and amusement. It was too much to face, and she went upstairs saying however to herself that when Martin came up she would go to him at once.

Lady Frome made a great deal of Stella—partly because she genuinely liked her, partly because people were talking about her, partly because she wanted her to play twice during the evening, as one of her singers had disappointed her. Stella at first responded somewhat absently, but gradually the elder woman's judicious flattery, and the early arrival of some of the guests lulled her uneasiness, and she began to lead the talk and laughter again, and feel the excitement which the idea of playing to so large an audience gave her. She scarcely noticed the arrival of Grace, who, seeing her sister-in-law was surrounded by people, did not attempt to get near her. Instead she sat down and involuntarily found herself watching the animated talk which, as the others moved off, began between Ronald and Stella. Ronald was almost whispering, and Grace felt that Stella should not have smiled up at him with quite so much ease or bent her head forward so eagerly to hear what he was saying.

The men of the party—and Martin, of course among them—did not leave the dining room till very late, and found the music room already full of people—men standing about, and women in shining silks and satins, sitting on gold cane chairs. Martin looked at his watch with an expression of annoyance, but glancing round went straight up to Lady Frome, who was still receiving her guests in the doorway.

"Stella is rather nervous, dear Lady Frome, and I know would much rather play before your rooms are quite full, and above all before Mme. Belinski comes," said Martin, too mindful of his rôle with Lady Frome to give the real reason for this request, which was simply that he wanted to hear his wife play before he went off to the House.

"But she is my principal attraction, Mr. Martin," answered Lady Frome. "People will care much more for her than for Mme. Belinski, However she has promised me to play twice: so if she really wants to begin, let us go and tell her." Lady Frome had rapidly reflected that as none of her professionals had yet arrived, and her rooms seemed full already, it would perhaps be just as well to begin. Martin and Lady Frome advanced toward Stella together.

Martin began at once, "As you are so nervous, Stella, Lady Frome has kindly consented to let you play at once," and his eyes twinkled.

"I can't play at all," said Stella faintly, without looking up, "I must go home."

"You see," said Martin, turning to his hostess, "it will be much better for her to get it over before Mme. Belinski comes." Stella looked up at him amazed, she imagined that he would ask her at once why she wanted to go home—and here he was, instead, forcing her into playing at once.

Ronald Pierson came up, "Everyone is longing to hear you," he said, and there was a little murmur of the people round. Before she could remonstrate again Martin was taking her to the piano.

"You backed me splendidly," he said to her. "I'm sure Lady Frome would much rather think you were nervous than that I am on tenterhooks to hear you!"

Stella began to play—at first she really felt some of the fear which Martin had attributed to her, but before long the music itself took possession of her, and she thought no more about Fräulein, or her hesitations, or Martin, and oblivious of her audience played as if her whole being was pouring itself out along a torrent of notes. She never noticed that almost at the beginning, a stumpy, fat, dowdy, little woman in black silk with untidy red hair had been conducted to a seat just behind her, and was now listening to

her with absorbed attention. Ronald and Martin, however, both saw Mme. Belinski, and watched with pleasure her evident appreciation. For the little woman clasped her hands with pleasure, looked from right to left at all the unknown faces as if for sympathy, and finally fixed an ardent gaze upon Stella's face.

The moment Stella stopped, Martin, who was standing close to the door, turned to go: He heard a storm of applause, and just before he went out, he looked back once more into the room, and saw Mme. Belinski impulsively jump up from her chair and seize both Stella's hands. He went off delighted, and if he had stayed a moment longer he would have seen the little fat figure suddenly throw its arms round Stella's neck and kiss her. Lady Frome was enchanted—the incident was so picturesque, and she explained rapidly to everyone near her, what had happened. Stella herself was quite bewildered by the storm of words in a foreign accent which burst over her head, but she guessed the name of her enthusiastic admirer in a moment, and felt that wonderful glow of pleasure which is roused by praise from the master in a craft.

"You are a genie," Mme. Belinski kept saying, "you want a little more *souple*—but I can teach you all—all!"

The eyes of everyone in the room were by

now fixed upon the pair, and Lady Frome felt that this was the moment to ask the famous pianist to begin. Mme. Belinski took off her gloves rapidly, still talking to Stella, and sat down.

She played a national air, a great swinging march, and to Stella it seemed as if her own triumph were being celebrated. She remembered the elation she had experienced when everyone applauded her at the Piersons'—and now again to-night! Was a great artistic future really before her, would she be able to rule her fellows and sway their emotions? Perhaps there is no one who has not at some time or other felt this sense of power—brought about by the inspiration of a new love or a new idea or merely, as in Stella's case, by the praise of those around. For a moment the wings which lie folded in each of us seem to break their bonds and we float above the world. Stella looked round the room, and her thoughts turned naturally toward Martin. Where was he? How he would sympathize with her—and encourage her! The suspicion darted suddenly into her mind that he was gone—and with it the recollection of all she had to say to him. Yes, there was no doubt—he was no longer in the room—how terrible it was—she must go after him at once—or go home—anything to get away from this intolerable jarring contrast. She

moved the moment Mme. Belinski stopped, unnoticed by anyone but Ronald Pierson who vainly tried to follow her.

The silence and darkness when she stepped into her brougham, instead of soothing her, brought a new flood of memory and shame upon her, and she felt herself turn hot with apprehension as she wondered whether Fräulein were still alive.

Perhaps she would find a fresh summons and be obliged to start then and there, without even changing her gown. She shuddered and longed to know the worst, for fear was twisting her heart. It was an immense relief to her to find no telegram or letter on the hall table, and she breathed more freely. No news was always good news—by this time Fräulein was probably out of danger. Martin was not yet back, so she went slowly upstairs to bed, and, her apprehensions gradually calmed by her ready belief that Fräulein was better, she very soon began to dwell again in imagination upon her triumph, and to wonder if Mme. Belinski would really give her some lessons. She felt inclined, late as it was, to go downstairs and begin practicing at once, but instead she crept into her little son's room and laid a soft kiss upon his rosy cheek.

CHAPTER VI.

"Ce n'est pas assez d'avoir de grandes qualités,
il en faut avoir l'œconomie."

STELLA passed an uneasy night, she was dozing when Martin came home, and the courage which had failed her in her waking hours, naturally did not come to her aid when she was half asleep. Next morning she woke to find the sun pouring into her room, but with an uneasy sense of something very uncomfortable about to happen, and as she sat up in bed she remembered that this morning she must tell Martin about the telegram. He was already up—his restless temperament never allowed him to sleep late, and he always got up when he woke, and amused himself with one or other of his various occupations—carving, or drawing, or modeling.

Stella dressed herself in a fever of apprehension—how should she ever tell Martin that she had disregarded the telegram? She hunted about for the piece of pink paper and put it in her pocket, determined that she would lay it silently before him. But at breakfast Martin was full of eager questions about the concert, and

Stella described it all with great vividness, and laughed and joked about it with feverish excitement. Every moment it seemed more and more difficult, indeed impossible, to tell Martin. Her fears were now directed into this channel, and the prospect of going to Leyton seemed easy in comparison. All at once, in the middle of a sentence, it struck her that she might wait till Martin went out, and then go at once to Leyton herself, leaving word for him where she was. Then when she came home again, it would be easy to tell him after she had done the right thing. Yes, that was what she would do, and, comforted by this thought, she threw herself more and more into the amusement of the moment. The fact that no letter or fresh message had come from Leyton was a good sign, and if only Martin went out as early as he sometimes did, she would be able to get down there before one o'clock.

"I've got this tiresome Art Exhibition Committee this morning at eleven," said Martin, drinking his last drop of tea. "It's rather curious, Stella, that there should be no more news of your governess, she must be better I suppose," and then not waiting for an answer. "You will know where to find me if anything happens, and you want me, and I shall be in to luncheon."

Stella went upstairs almost happy. Her resolve

to go to Leyton at once had lifted a great weight from her mind. The day before, she had revolted against the idea, but it now seemed easy and desirable in contrast with the difficulty of explaining the situation to Martin.

She began looking out the trains in Bradshaw, and found to her annoyance that she could not catch a train at once. She was in truth afraid of her own resolution, and would have liked to start the very moment after she heard Martin bang the front door; she feared her own imagination, her own thoughts, and flitted about the room, not allowing her mind to pause. After ringing the bell and giving her orders about the carriage, she was collecting one or two pieces of music to put into her box, when the door opened and Grace walked in.

The complexity of Grace Grantham's feeling was mirrored on her face. For she had received early that morning a telegram from Lady Hambledon stating that a telegram had been sent the day before to Stella, of which no notice had been taken, and asking her to spare no efforts to make Stella come as soon as possible. Fräulein was dying.

Poor Grace stared at the message in dismay. She had been so proud of Stella the evening before, and watched her triumph with keen pleasure, but now the thought of such callousness

stirred both her anger and indignation. She started at once on her mission, trying all the way along to force herself to believe that there must be a mistake, and that Stella could never have received the telegram. Martin, she reflected, would certainly have made her go. She recalled Stella's laughter and her apparent gayety, and assured herself that no one who had just been summoned to a death-bed could have been as light-hearted. But inconsistently enough, when she remembered her half repressed criticisms of the night before, as she watched Stella talking to Ronald Pierson, and her suspicions that this intimacy was deeper than Martin knew, her fears returned upon her. She rang the bell with great apprehension, the undisturbed accustomed air of the hall impressed her painfully, and when she heard that Martin was out, and Stella in the drawing room, her heart sank. She flew up the stairs unannounced, and burst into the room. Stella was standing beside the open piano, dressed in one of the plain white gowns she had made characteristic of her. As she saw Grace, she turned deathly pale and neither moved nor spoke.

Grace also stood still for a moment—explanations between them hardly seemed necessary.

"What are you doing?" she said. "Why aren't you at Leyton?"

Her tone was harsh and imperious. Perhaps if she had spoken gently, perhaps if she had gone up to Stella and kissed her and said: "You must come with me now," Stella would have thrown herself into her sister's arms, have wept and been conquered. But Grace was too angry, and when no response came from Stella, she went on, "I can see you know perfectly well that Fräulein is ill—you must have had the telegram."

Stella never lied, and she felt no desire to lie now, for Grace's hard and scolding attitude roused her temper and her antagonism. A moment before, and she would have told Grace how she had not meant to put it off so long—how she was at that moment preparing to start. But a kind of desperate pride is the last stand of a fighter in a bad cause—Stella knew that she was in the wrong, knew that Grace was justly angry, but this very anger roused in her a resentment on which she could lean.

"Yes," she said in a calm voice though inwardly trembling, "I had the telegram."

"And you mean to say that you simply disregarded it?" cried Grace, her voice growing louder. "Where was Martin, why didn't he make you go?"

"Martin was out," said Stella shortly.

Grace in her excitement sat down upon the

nearest chair, her legs shaking under her. Was everything changed? Was this hard calm woman really Stella?

"You don't seem to realize what all this means?" she went on nervously, beginning to pull off her gloves. "It means that you are wicked and cruel. Fräulein is dying—dying, do you understand?—and knowing this, you could yet spend the evening dressed up in your best clothes, flirting at a party."

Stella by this time was shaking with anger. She clenched her fists and held her arms rigidly straight.

"I won't let you talk to me like this," she said. "I won't listen. You don't understand—you never do."

"Don't understand," echoed Grace, in a voice of scorn standing up again. "Oh, yes! I understand very well—you are so hardened already by the world, so spoilt by flattery, that if you ever had a heart, it is dead; you think of nothing but your petty ridiculous triumphs and your flirtations. Remember that I was at the party last night. I know what you were doing," Grace turned half round as if to go, but the word flirtations reiterated a second time struck Stella.

"I don't know what you mean by flirtation," she exclaimed vehemently. "But you had better say it—all of it."

"Yes, I will," cried Grace, forgetting in her anger that she had come to try and persuade Stella to start at once for Leyton. "I will tell you, if you want to know, that I cannot bear the way you spend your days, thinking of nothing but your own pleasure, morning, noon, and night, and neglecting your duties for the sake of flirting with Ronald Pierson."

Grace paused out of breath—checked for a moment by the strange sound of her own voice uttering ideas which she herself hardly knew existed in her own consciousness. Anger is often like a forcing house to our unformulated suspicions—our suppressed resentments; in the heat of the moment they spring up suddenly to life, and surprise us by their height.

Grace was horrified all at once at her own anger—who was she that she should accuse and judge—and then the recollection of her object in coming flashed across her. Instead of reproaching Stella for the past, should she not be struggling to help her to do better now? Her strong but controlled nature, which for a moment had got loose, swung back at once into this position. Stella was still standing erect and silent, and Grace went on in a calmer tone.

"Forgive me, Stella, I have said more than I meant, . . . and come with me at once to Leyton: it may not be too late."

"I'll never forgive you," said Stella, stamping her foot. "Never! So you'd better go away and not insult me any more. I won't come with you to Leyton. You say I'm wicked and cruel, and you make me so. Go away!"

"Stella! Stella!" cried Grace in a despairing tone.

"It's no use appealing to me now," said Stella in a hard voice. "I won't listen to another word you say. You never try to understand me—you take for granted I am wicked, and you invent things, and you speak lies till you believe them."

Grace almost shrank with the pain these words gave her.

"Don't say things you'll be sorry for after," she begged. "Forget all about this silly squabble, and put on your things directly and come with me. It's all my fault, I know—but be generous and forgive me—for Fräulein's sake." In her anxiety, Grace moved a step nearer to Stella. But Stella turned away like a naughty child.

"Go away!" she said again. Grace looked at her for a second, the tears beginning to come into her eyes—it was a terrible moment for her, and she realized it as a crisis in Stella's soul. She put out her arms silently with an expression in her face of the most tender entreaty. But it was too late; Stella's eyes were blind, the entry

to her heart was closed. Grace let her arms fall, and turned away. At the door she stopped for a moment as if in thought—her repentance over her own anger humbled and softened her—she would have given the world then to fold Stella close, close to her; her heart was overflowing with love and pity. Her soul went up in prayer for guidance, and it seemed to her that her punishment was to go away at once—she might make things worse by staying. It was evident that she was the last woman who could appeal successfully to Stella. So she opened the door quietly and went down the stairs without another word. . . The moment she was gone, Stella threw herself on her knees, her arms fell with a crash upon the keys of the piano, and she burst into passionate uncontrolled weeping.

"How dared she, how dared she?" she exclaimed over and over again as she recalled the words which Grace had uttered, dwelling however almost exclusively upon the accusation of flirting. Poor Stella! Of that at least she was innocent, and her mind unconsciously lingered upon the only point in Grace's attack which she could repel. This is the snare of denunciators—a step beyond the mark is a gain to the other side, and one exaggeration outweighs a hundred truths. But gradually she recalled the sense

of horror which had invaded her when Grace said "Fräulein is dying." Dying! dying! Perhaps she was already dead! Stella jumped up and, nerved to action, began hurriedly writing a telegram to Lady Hambledon saying she was coming at once. When she had given it to the servant, she ran upstairs to put on her things, finding there was only just time to get ready for the train. Everything, she felt—her delay—her quarrel—would be redeemed if she could only get down to Leyton in time. With trembling fingers she tied on her veil, giving orders to her maid about following by the next train. She did not even stop to go into the nursery, but hurried down to the hall just as her carriage drove up. The door was opened, and she stepped out, meeting on the threshold a telegraph boy. Her heart stopped within her. "Mrs. Bagehot," said the boy in an indifferent tone.

Stella took the telegram from him with a distinct prescience of what was coming.

"Fräulein died at 9.30 this morning," she read aloud. The servants behind her murmured sympathetically, and Stella turned back. Her face was hard set—she crumpled the telegram in her hand and moved toward the staircase.

"Hadn't I better stop your telegram, ma'am?" said the butler. "It hasn't gone yet.

Stella stared at him as if she did not know what he meant—then she almost laughed.

"Oh, yes, stop it," she cried and began walking upstairs.

"She don't seem to care much, do she?" said the butler to the maid. But Emma only shrugged her shoulders as if to say that the feelings of ladies were inscrutable things.

Meanwhile Stella pursued her way upstairs in a state of numb anger. Everything was against her, she told herself. God meant her to be wicked and cruel. Why could not Fräulein have died two or three hours later?

Grace would never care for her again, Martin would be horrified, but she did not mind. Her whole life was a wreck, but at least she could amuse herself. Grace should see that she did not care in the least for all her invective; she would go out now this moment and get hold of Ronald Pierson and flirt with him. She heard the baby's voice on the upper landing uttering some unintelligible sounds, and her thoughts stopped for a moment. But she did not go up to her child.

CHAPTER VII.

"They will not give us love and tears."

WHEN Martin came home, he found Stella waiting for him in his little sitting room downstairs. She had been out, had even been up to the Piersons' door in Bruton Street, but driven by some silent impulse, she turned away and came home again. One thing was quite clear to her, and she never hesitated about it, she must tell Martin everything. The habit of talking to him about all she saw, did, or felt was so strong that it stood the strain of even a situation like the present one, where every motive of fear would have urged her to keep him in ignorance of what had occurred as long as possible. But the very thoughtlessness in Stella's character which allowed her to act so entirely on her own inclination, naïvely expecting to be followed by the love and admiration which she had always received, made it difficult for her ever to pretend. She said what she thought, did what she wished, and though indignant at disapproval, would not attempt to disarm it. It was therefore impossi-

ble for her to lie to Martin, and she was determined to spare herself or him nothing.

"I've got something to tell you," she began at once in a hard clear little voice, without getting up from her chair.

"Yes?" said Martin, shutting the door. "What is it?"

"Fräulein died this morning at nine o'clock."

Martin stopped still with surprise in the middle of the room.

"What a terrible thing!" he said. "I ought to have let you go. But why didn't they send for you again?"

"They did," said Stella not raising her eyes and speaking in a low rapid voice. "Aunt Maisie sent me a telegram to say the illness was not infectious. I got it just as I was starting for Lady Frome's party. I was all dressed and I wanted to see you first. I felt I couldn't go alone. And then you were late, and all that fuss happened, and you went away, and I hadn't the courage to tell you in the middle of the night. And this morning I was going by the 11.10 train, and I telegraphed to say so, and just as I was starting the news came."

"Oh, Stella!" said Martin. "How dreadful! Why didn't you tell me?"

"I don't know," said Stella looking up, her lips beginning to tremble. "It seemed as if I couldn't,"

Martin knelt down beside her and took her hands which were shaking.

"I thought you would make me go," she said.

Martin did not answer; in truth he was utterly perplexed and bewildered. Was this all fear? Was his theory that Stella's revolt against grief arose from too strong a power of feeling a delusion? Was it possible that Stella had no heart? His eyes were searching her face as he thought these thoughts.

"You haven't heard all yet, Martin," said Stella. "I've had a fearful quarrel with Grace. She came to fetch me, and she said," and here Stella began to break down, "she said I was a wicked woman, and that I flirted with Ronald Pierson. How dared she say such a thing to me?" she cried letting her anger overmaster her again, and pulling her hands away from Martin. "It's not true and she's no right to come preaching at me. I'll never speak to her again—never!"

Martin was astounded at her passionate tone, and he instantly felt angry with his sister. "How blundering and tactless Grace is," he thought as he put his arms round Stella, and comforted her. "Of course it is not true. Don't imagine I think so for a moment," he whispered; but the uncomfortable reflection crossed his mind that Stella was only crying in anger, not in sorrow. For the first time in their married life, he was obliged to

confess to himself that he did not understand his wife. How should he ever explain to her Grace?

When those who love us cannot understand us, it is often because we cannot understand ourselves. It was some dim realization of this which roused in him a stronger tenderness even while he criticised. His faith in Stella's heart was only shaken for a moment. She was so young—it was only natural she should shrink in this way—but few people would judge her rightly, Grace perhaps least of all.

"Where is Fräulein going to be buried?" he asked when Stella was calmer.

"I don't know," said Stella. "I know nothing yet."

"Poor Fräulein!" said Martin. "How she did love you, and what will your father do without her?"

"Oh, isn't it all horrible?" cried Stella. "I can't bear it. Martin don't let me think about it—help me to forget it," and she held out her hands to him and hid her face on his shoulder. Martin could not resist her, he began to talk about other things, avoiding even any further mention of the quarrel with Grace which he hoped would prove less formidable than it sounded.

. . . . .

While all this had been passing in London, the scene at Leyton had in some ways been less tragic than Grace in her miserable drive home had pictured it. For Fräulein, after moaning Stella's name half the night, had sunk into unconsciousness, and the firm belief which everyone round her held that Stella would arrive by the next train seemed to affect the fever-stricken woman. She never regained consciousness, but at the last she raised her head as if she saw someone,—said "Stella" and dropped back dead.

"I am certain," Lady Hambledon wrote to Grace the same day, "I am certain that the poor woman thought Stella was in the room at the end. God is very kind sometimes. I telegraphed at once to Stella to stop her coming down uselessly. What was Martin doing not to send her before? I cannot in this chamber of Death go into my feelings on the subject. She looks very peaceful—almost beautiful. Ralph—more distressed than I thought he would be—does not say much, and I do not know whether he realizes about Stella. Write and tell me what has happened; is anything wrong with Stella? I cannot think that she would have stayed away if she could have helped it."

Grace hesitated for some time after reading this letter, as to whether she should send it to Stella, and finally decided to do so, thinking that

it might comfort her to hear that Fräulein had at least imagined her presence. For she pictured her sister-in-law undergoing an agony of remorse and sorrow.

But Grace had not reckoned with Stella's power of resentment, nor with the strength of her determination not to let her mind rest on any sorrowful aspect. It was easy enough for her to forget Fräulein's absence, as she had lived without her companionship for the last two years; and the pain of her quarrel with Grace, she smothered in angry recriminations. When the letter arrived, therefore, it only irritated her more; and Grace's few words detailing her sympathy, she tore up at once. Lady Hambledon had written to Stella by the same post, telling her the funeral was to be at Leyton in two days, and taking for granted that she would be present at it.

Stella made no comment when Martin began discussing the details of times and trains: she saw by his face that there was to be no appeal. She had never seen a funeral, and the horror of it haunted her imagination. Like an animal struggling to escape, she kept trying to invent reasons and arguments why she should not go, always having to reject them as unconvincing. She ordered herself a black gown, and bought a lot of deep purple pansies, intending to make a wreath with her own hands to put upon the grave, for-

getting for a few moments in her preparations the dread which lay at her heart.

The funeral was to be on Thursday: On the Wednesday evening, Martin went to see his sister. He was greatly moved by the interview: for Grace, instead of being angry with Stella, showed nothing but loving pity, increased tenfold when Martin told her how Stella had been on the point of starting for Leyton. Her own fault in their quarrel had so subdued the merely personal aspect of it, that her sympathy was unobscured, and she could read the real meaning of the episode.

"It will all come right, dearest," she said to him. "Stella is too generous to bear resentment long. We shall meet naturally at the funeral."

"Are you going?" asked Martin surprised.

"Yes," said Grace. "I made friends with Fräulein, you know, at your wedding. Besides I feel as if I owed her something for provoking Stella. At any rate I want to go," she concluded rather shyly.

Thursday morning was brilliantly fine, and Stella seeing no release possible, dressed herself in her black clothes, and came down to breakfast feeling miserably ill. She had so worked upon her nerves by anticipating the terrors of the day, that she really could hardly control herself.

Martin was painfully struck with her appear-

ance, and his heart yearned over her. He had said nothing about his interview with Grace, but he felt that he must tell her before they started that his sister intended to be at the funeral. He nervously began assuring her Grace was only longing to make up the quarrel, and that she felt she had been hasty and unjust.

Stella said nothing.

"She is coming to the funeral," continued Martin, "and you must meet there as friends."

"Grace coming to-day!" ejaculated Stella—a sudden revolt surged up in her—"I shan't go then," she said decidedly.

"Stella! Stella!" exclaimed Martin remonstrating.

"No, I won't!" she cried. "What business is it of hers. Why should she go to Leyton? She wants to see how I'm going to behave, I suppose."

She was hardly conscious that in the back of her mind was the idea that this was her way of escape, but continued to flog her resentment with Grace till it fairly ran away with her.

Martin begged, pleaded, insisted in vain; and at last he got angry too.

"I could not have believed," he said, "that you would be so ungenerous—this sort of resentment at the very edge of a new grave is horrible. I shall go without you—you are not in a fit spirit to come."

"Yes, go—go and take sides with everybody against me!" cried Stella rising and walking out of the door. She ran upstairs at once and locked herself into her room.

The silence round her seemed to stop the angry flow of her thoughts. On the floor at her feet lay a great purple pansy-heart which she had been making for Fräulein, and the sight of it pierced her like a knife. She went down on her knees beside it, her eyes blinded by hot scalding tears.

"I'm not wicked! I know I'm not!" she kept saying as she smoothed the petals of the flowers. "Whatever I've done and whatever anyone says, I know I'm not wicked!" She stooped and kissed the pansies. "Tell her I'm not wicked!" she whispered to them.

Then she rang the bell, and sent her maid down with the flowers to be put into the carriage, feeling a little calmer when this was done.

At last she heard the front door bang, and the sound of the wheels driving off.

She flew to the window—but Martin never looked up—only the unseeing back of the brougham stared at her as it passed down the street.

She turned away and threw herself upon the bed in a passion of tears.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Not always is the heart unwise
Nor pity idly borne,
If even a passing stranger sighs
For them who do not mourn."

IT had seemed to Stella when she was left behind in her bedroom on the morning of Fräulein's funeral, as if no portion of her life could ever be the same again, as if she had lost forever her married happiness and her own springs of joy. But life plays us strange tricks sometimes, surrounding our experience with portents of change only to allow them to fade away unfulfilled, like little wreaths of wind which may be forerunners of a storm but yet leave the surface of the water smooth and unruffled after they have passed.

Martin was one of those men who mind nothing so much as a disturbance in the serenity of their relations with others; he was also profoundly convinced of the theory that people can never alter their nature—forgetting that although this may be partly true, they can control the objects to which they mean to dedicate it.

Stella had been frightened, Stella had been naughty, but as soon as his momentary anger was past, there was an end of the whole subject. When he came back from Leyton and found her lying on her bed, white and passive, he covered the whole episode with silence, and surrounded her at once with all the tender little attentions to which she was accustomed. Grace Grantham's face at the funeral had indeed brought a rush of reflections into his mind, and made him wonder what she would think of Stella if she knew the true cause of her absence. But this very wonder ranged him instantly upon his wife's side, and he merely told Grace briefly that Stella was ill, and showed her the purple heart which he had found in the brougham.

The fine morning turned to wet drizzling rain, and the whole ceremony was inexpressibly dreary. Fräulein had no relations to follow her, and the one being for whom she had given her love and service was not there. Mr. Morecombe stood at the open grave for a few moments, alone, absently crumbling in his hand a bit of earth which fell with faint thuds upon the partially covered coffin. But he made no comment or complaint to anyone, and when Martin told him that Stella was ill, he declared that she ought to come to Leyton for a time.

"There is a specially healthful quality in one's

native air," he said. "If poor Fräulein Schmidt could have got back to Germany, I believe she would have lived."

When Stella found that Martin was just the same toward her as ever, when she could detect no subtle change in his manner, she was half bewildered, and, in an unaccountable manner, almost ashamed. But gradually, as her pleasures came thick upon her again, she gave herself up to enjoyment once more. The only dark spot in her daily thoughts was the quarrel with Grace, whom she obstinately refused to see. Martin, after one brief expostulation, came to his usual conclusion that these things must arrange themselves. He could not understand her extreme resentment with Grace, for she had not resented *his* interference or his plain speaking. But he did not perceive how intensely she shrank from the spectacle of any disapproval, nor realize that he had only bought his own ease of intercourse with her by shifting the standard to which she should aspire, from his own hands to those of another. Perhaps if he could have sounded the depths of Stella's heart by corresponding depths in his own—making her fathom her own nature if she would fathom his—perhaps the will which fought desperately against the power of sorrow might have been conquered then. But it was not to be—Martin's easy temperament, on the

contrary, had in reality aided Stella's revolt; and it remained for a sadder and a deeper experience than any she had yet endured, to call to life in her nature that spirit of common suffering and common grief without which we walk this world in selfish blindness.

. . . . .

A fortnight later, and Stella's life had resumed its usual course. She was very busy enjoying herself in all her various ways—chiefly occupied with preparations for Ronald Pierson's entertainment. Looking at her casually, it would have been impossible to note any difference in her expression; but eyes which loved the bright radiance of her face could have seen an unwonted look of expectation—almost of fear, cross her eyes now and then. She had gazed for a moment upon the face of Medusa, and could not quite forget.

Martin and Stella hardly ever mentioned Grace's name, though she knew perfectly well that he went to see his sister as constantly as ever. She resented these visits intensely: it seemed to her that Martin ought to have taken her part more emphatically, and refused to forgive his sister till she had withdrawn her unjust accusations. She was far too proud to remonstrate with her husband, but she watched his comings and goings with the keen suspicion and

insight of jealousy, and knew quite well from his manner, when he had been with Grace. Once she said to him, with a little forced laugh:

"Well, I suppose you have been hearing what a horror I am, with new proofs, haven't you?"

Martin turned away half impatient, half pained —Stella said no more. But the sense that she was disapproved of, burnt into her consciousness.

There were rehearsals going on almost every day, and Stella was not only in request for her own contribution, but none of the performers seemed able to dispense with her help—even Miss Ellen did not disdain her advice as to whether she should actually hide under the table in the dance, or whether she should only run behind it.

There were dresses to arrange, and scenery to be devised, and the programme made out, and Ronald brought every detail to Stella.

Ever since her quarrel with Grace, she had allowed a distinct manner of change to creep into her intercourse with the young man; she felt both humiliated and reckless, and said to herself that if she were to have the credit of a flirtation, she might as well have its amusement. She was also far too much in love with Martin to have any fears; many a woman begins to flirt only because she feels secure.

Ronald had of course been very quick to perceive a change, and to take full advantage of it, although he never could deceive himself as to her real feeling for him. But it pleased him to gather a few more of the outward tokens of intimacy—to be more constantly with her, and constitute himself more openly her servant.

The rehearsals usually took place at about five o'clock, and the last two or three days Stella was busy from morning till evening. She therefore saw very little of her baby, and hardly noticed a certain drowsiness which seemed to descend upon him from time to time. Rose was slightly uneasy, but she assured herself all day long that it was only the inevitable tooth-cutting, and said little to Stella.

But the morning came when the child hardly seemed able to lift his head, and Rose was startled to see him lying in his bed with his eyes fixed, apparently staring at nothing. She was just going to call Stella and make her send for the doctor, when little Richard smiled faintly and let his lids drop. Rose thought she had grown over nervous during the last few days, and took the child up to dress him. But his languor was stronger than ever, and once or twice before he was ready, he seemed to have dropped off into a heavy sleep. When Stella came up—all ready dressed to go out—for this was the great day and

she had a hundred things to get before the last dress rehearsal, Rose was just beginning to ladle some milk into his mouth.

"How is he this morning, Rose?" she said.

Rose did not answer for a moment.

"Look at him, Miss Stella," she said at last; "I don't like the looks of him at all—I don't understand it. Look at this!" and she held up his tiny hands one after the other both tightly clenched.

"But he's always clenching his fists," objected Stella. "There's nothing in that. His eyes do look heavy, but then he's half asleep."

But at the sound of her voice, the baby opened his eyes again, gave a little crow of pleasure and held out his arms. Stella took him at once, kissed him all over and began walking up and down the room with him. He seemed to revive in her presence, and in a few moments was almost himself again. Stella laughed, and Rose too began to smile.

"It's only those teeth, I expect," she said. "Poor little fellow, and he's so bright, and he takes so much notice—it's no wonder his head grows hot."

"Well," said Stella, "I must go out now, but mind you send for the doctor, Rose, I'd much rather be on the safe side."

Rose was watching the baby sitting on the

floor where Stella had placed him. He looked perfectly well.

"I don't think I need," she said, "unless he gets drowsy again—then I will."

Stella went off comparatively happy; she understood nothing of Rose's fears, and dismissed the subject from her mind.

The rehearsal was in an empty hall where the performance was to take place that evening, and nothing could exceed the dreariness of the dim dusty atmosphere and the rows and rows of untenanted chairs. There is something comic in the expectant patient attitude of an empty chair; it is formed so exclusively to fit a certain angle of the human body, that without one, it looks incomplete and almost ludicrous. Stella felt it would be quite impossible to act here, and only Ronald's almost tearful dismay induced her to try. The scene was just the same as it always is on these occasions. Every performer was longing to try the effect of his or her voice, and each, while pretending to be indifferent, was constantly betraying his preoccupation.

"Ought I to enter left or right, Mr. Ronald?" cried Mrs. Hesketh, who was contributing a dramatic interlude in song.

"Shall I wax my mustache ends, Pierson?" from Sir George Baden who was to give the last popular ballad.

"Is an encore to be allowed?" from Miss Ellen. These were the kind of questions with which Ronald was deluged. But he preserved his temper, managed to infuse some fire into his actors, and came away at last more or less satisfied.

He had arranged to give Stella a luncheon at a restaurant, determined to spend the afternoon in finding a particular kind of long gold chain which she was to wear round her neck. It was only an excuse for making an expedition with her, and for giving her a present; but Ronald had so impressed Stella with the importance of this detail in her make-up, that she felt convinced she should act badly without it, and declined to listen to the faint hints which her conscience whispered to her.

The luncheon was a very successful affair, ordered at an Italian restaurant somewhere close to Trafalgar Square. Ronald had never seen Stella so charming or so kind to him, and he did not know that just as they were driving down Pall Mall, they had passed Grace in a hansom. Stella stared fixedly in an opposite direction, but she nevertheless felt Grace look at her, and almost heard the comment which she imagined her sister-in-law would make on discovering who was with her. She made an impatient gesture of defiance, and began recklessly enough to flirt

more definitely with Ronald than she had ever allowed herself or indeed felt inclined to before.

Ronald was lifted suddenly into an ecstatic atmosphere—he did not stop to analyze her feelings or his feelings, but culled the pleasures of the moment almost greedily. The pair drove about from shop to shop—Ronald of course knew every seller of bric-à-brac in London, and there was nothing he enjoyed so much as entering the small domain in which he felt himself a savant.

There's a little narrow alley called Hanway Street which turns out of one of the biggest thoroughfares of London. Coming straight from all the noisy and aggressive nineteenth century life of the large street, the quiet deserted air of this little place had a great charm. The shops are all somewhat dingy, even though the windows are full of old silver and paste ornaments. Miss Jacobs—a fine handsome Jewess, was Ronald's best hope, and he made straight for her unpretentious shop. She was a great collector, and as soon as she heard what was wanted, she put her hands on her hips and, looking up sideways with a kind of gross raillery, said:

"Now don't tell me, Mr. Ronald, that when you brought your young lady here in this innocent way, you didn't know perfectly well about my having bought a chain from that French

feller who comes over here sometimes—you always do know everything."

"Well Miss Jacobs" said Ronald evasively "I won't say I didn't have great hopes of you" and he began poking about among a lot of loose trinkets. With a great deal of ceremony Miss Jacobs at length undid a big iron safe, and brought out of an old round leather box, a long chain of exceedingly beautiful workmanship and design—a combination of enamel brilliants and delicate gold chain. Stella almost involuntarily exclaimed aloud, and clapped her hands with pleasure. She picked it up and examined with delight the details of the design—clasped hands and wreaths of flowers joined by graceful links.

"Now I want a good bit of money for that" began Miss Jacobs. "I want . . ."

Ronald put up his hand: "Never mind the price" he said. "Mrs. Bagehot shall have the chain now, and you and I will settle about the price after."

Stella had put the chain round her neck, but at these words she took it off again.

"No! Mr. Ronald" she said. "I can't really accept it from you; I can't allow you to spend so much money on me," and she laid the chain down on the counter.

Miss Jacobs was a shrewd woman, and she saw

at once how matters stood—with a meaning glance at Ronald she said

"Why don't you lend it to her for a little?"

"Oh" cried Stella picking up the chain again. "Why shouldn't we have it just for to-night?" and she began in her rapid eager way explaining her performance to Miss Jacobs. In the meantime that discreet lady had brought in a looking-glass, and was watching Stella arrange the chain in a hundred different ways upon her white dress.

Ronald was only half satisfied, but he gave in at once, determined in his own mind to send the beautiful ornament to her as soon as the performance was over. He began at once to compose a note in his mind begging her to accept the chain which she had honored by wearing on the stage.

A ray of sun found its way through Miss Jacobs' bedizened window, striking sympathetic gleams from the glittering paste stones and the silver cups and boxes hanging there. It pierced the dust which lay thick in every corner and on every ledge, and it seemed to send up a kind of haze. In this luminous atmosphere stood Stella—her hair roused into a brighter gold. Her momentary scruples were all satisfied, and with the chain hanging round her, a little pleased smile on her mouth, the light of excitement in

her eyes, she looked like a vision of youth and enjoyment suddenly lightening this dull world. The atmosphere of our presence, the color as it were of our temperament, does sometimes show itself with startling vividness in a momentary picture to those who have eyes to see. Ronald had once been nerved to courage by a woman who, after a night of agonized watching, silently pointed to the dawn which was beginning to show round the rim of the closed shutters, and had felt with a sudden vibration of his being the revelation of that woman's soul. And now as he looked at Stella, he felt something of the same in kind; she was the bright flawless jewel of life, and the dingy dust of this little dark shop only existed to be her foil.

Miss Jacobs had gone away, and Ronald felt as if he were in a dream and hardly responsible for himself. Stella had taken off her gloves in her attempts to arrange the chain, and the sight of her little white hand hanging idly down was too much for him. He stooped and lifting it to his lips, kissed it passionately two or three times, murmuring something inaudible about his love for her beauty.

Stella drew her hand back. She was not exactly displeased, but startled, and besides she heard Miss Jacobs returning. She wondered why she did not feel more angry as they drove

away together, why on the contrary there was a little thrill of excitement in her veins. Ronald was silent, and Stella tried to put him at his ease, and finally, when she jumped out at her own door, gave him one last grateful and sympathetic glance. But in spite of this, Ronald felt a great ache at his heart, as if he could hardly bear to let her pass beyond him to the other side of that door. Was it because in trying to grasp his dream, he had dispelled it—or was it some strange foreknowledge that this was indeed the last time Stella would see the world through undimmed eyes?

For on the other side of that door, trouble was waiting for Stella. Little Richard had fallen into a heavy stupor early in the afternoon, and the doctor had pronounced no definite opinion. It might or it might not be grave, he said, but he would call again about seven o'clock.

Stella flew upstairs, her heart beating rapidly; the baby was lying in his cot asleep, but without the rosy warm look of a healthy child resting. His little face was very pale, and there were blue shadows round his eyes. But the actual sight of the child seemed to reassure Stella, the power to touch his little hand gave her a sense of the reality of his life, and made it impossible for her to imagine, as she had done in the hall, that he was already dead.

"Perhaps when the doctor comes again, he'll say it's nothing" she said to Rose standing near. "The worst of it is" she went on, not waiting for any answer "I've got to act to-night, and I don't see how I can throw them over."

"Well you can't do anything you know" said Rosa stolidly, with a grim feeling that it was just as well to get Stella out of the way. "Besides you'll see the doctor first."

"Yes! if he's punctual" assented Stella.

Martin came home full of interest in the coming performance, and prepared to hear Stella's account of the last rehearsal. To his great surprise, he found his wife in tears; for Stella when she got downstairs again had become quite unnerved, and the very sight of her costume lying ready for her to put on, and of the chain which she and Ronald had found, made her feel that it was impossible for her to leave her child. She no longer cared in the least about her frustrated triumph, or about Ronald's disappointment, and clung to her husband begging him to write at once and say that she could not come. Martin soothed her, and after running upstairs to see the child, he bent his whole mind on reassuring her and persuading her to go. It struck neither of them as strange that their mutual positions in the only differences they had ever had, were now reversed. Stella longing to

stay where she felt she ought to be, Martin trying to make her leave her post. But we are much influenced by opposites, and Stella's evident uneasiness and fear inclined Martin to think that she and Rose exaggerated the danger, and it would be far better for her to fulfill her engagement and occupy her mind.

"It isn't as if you could do anything" he said when he saw that he had made an impression on Stella, "Rose is much more competent than you. Besides you can come home as soon as ever your part is done; and then you'll probably find that Richard is all right again."

Martin was an optimist, and he so thoroughly believed this and enunciated his belief in such firm tones that Stella was more than half comforted. She reflected how sorry she would be next day that she had not acted if Richard was quite well again, and decided to go through with the evening.

CHAPTER IX.

" O Father touch the east and light,
The light that shone when Hope was born."

THE doctor did not come before it was time for Stella to start, and there was no change in little Richard's condition. She dressed herself with great care in the quaint dark-colored brocade which Ronald Pierson had chosen as just the right material for her gown. The coiffeur who came to arrange her hair was so struck by the beauty of its gold, that he turned to Martin who was lounging in a chair, watching the proceedings, and made a gesture of admiration. The hair was soon coiled up high with a ribbon dexterously twisted in it, and when the coiffeur had gone, Martin produced out of his pocket a delicate little miniature which he wanted Stella to wear. She fastened it on to Ronald's chain, explaining to Martin all the time about her afternoon.

He turned her round and round, inspected her from crown to sole, and finally put a little dab of rouge on to her soft cheeks, delighted with her appearance.

" You're enough to turn anyone's head ! " he

cried, holding her away from him by both her hands, and looking at her.

Stella forgot all about the baby, as they drove toward the hall. She could already hear the little hum of voices, the subdued hush which would fall when her acting began, the vociferous applause which would follow.

Ronald met them at the door of the greenroom, his face flushed and anxious.

"Oh! here you are, Mrs. Bagehot!" he cried relieved; "the hall is perfectly crammed, and Mrs. Heskett is just going on—now Martin you must go away at once and sit in the first row and clap your wife."

Martin kissed Stella furtively when Ronald turned his back, and went away. Inside the greenroom, all was hurried confusion, in spite of the fact that the performers had dressed in their own homes. But there were many last touches to be given, and last little bits of advice to be asked: Miss Ellen did not think that the word "Jam" was printed in large enough letters on her giant pot, while Mrs. Heskett, dressed in a very smart white satin gown, was nervously asking if the light could be turned down at the dramatic moment in her song. She was not very well satified with her place in the programme, and was besides annoyed at having to sing a song which had already made the reputation of one or two pro-

fessionals, instead of a female coster ballad which she had herself composed. Ronald had insisted, because everyone was raving about the musical dialogue with Death, and he said he wanted a contrast.

Sir George Baden tumbled down the steps, much elated by the success of his comic song, and Ronald cut short Mrs. Heskett's complaints by telling her she must go on the stage.

Stella begged to be allowed to stand unseen in the doorway, for she had never heard Mrs. Heskett's song, and besides her own performance was to come next. She could see the rows and rows of chairs, and distinguished many faces she knew, and in the very front row sat Sir Edgar Pierson, Martin, and, to her great surprise and annoyance, Grace.

However she hardly had time to think; for Mrs. Heskett began to sing.

In spite of the ludicrousness of the fact that the singer was supposed to be pleading with Death, who in the person of Mr. Heskett standing blandly beside her in unimpeachable evening clothes, uttered some bass refusals now and then, the very first notes of the song stirred Stella inexpressibly. Mrs. Heskett's singing was always very dramatic, and she had managed to produce a ring of agony in her voice. Either the words or Stella's unconsciously strained nerves

affected her strangely, for suddenly it seemed to her that her own soul was wrestling there on the platform with a relentless and wicked force. She listened breathless, her heart beating fast—terrified lest in this dialogue Death should be the conqueror. The song ended in a despairing cry, and Stella turned away trembling visibly, her eyes full of hot blinding tears. Through the haze they created, she suddenly saw the familiar figure of her maid Emma standing with a scared face close to her.

"Oh what is it?" she cried. Emma put her hand on her mistress' arm.

"Don't be frightened ma'am," she said kindly. "The doctor said I was to fetch you for Master Richard——"

"He's not dead is he?" asked Stella going in front of her fear.

Emma only said, "He's very bad," and began helping her mistress on with her cloak.

No thought of anyone or anything but the baby crossed poor Stella's mind—she wrapped herself up as well as she could with her trembling fingers, and meeting Ronald in the passage, just had the sense to answer his astonished questioning by saying she must go at once, for her baby was ill.

"But you go on next," said Ronald involuntarily. "It will only take ten minutes."

Stella hardly looked at him, and hurried on, this little episode making her entirely forget to send any message to Martin.

Up to the moment of getting into the cab, Stella had never stopped to think, and had acted entirely on her impulse, but as soon as the comparative silence of the street succeeded the noise and excitement of the greenroom, she had time to realize her terrors.

It seemed to her incredible that she should be here alone with Emma in a hansom, hurrying to see her dying child—for she never doubted he was dying. Her horror almost overmastered her, and she put up her hand to tell the driver to stop, but let it drop down again without doing anything. Emma interpreted her action as intended to urge the driver to go quicker, and so she spoke.

"The doctor said there wasn't no immediate danger, but Mrs. Bagehot must be sent for at once he said, as soon as ever he cast his eyes on the baby."

"What's the matter with him, how does he look?" asked Stella.

"I don't know ma'am, I haven't seen him, I wouldn't intrude on nurse on such an occasion, but Fanny who took nurse's food in, said he looks dreadful—his eyes turned quite back, and his breathing very heavy."

Stella shuddered and felt faint, she could

scarcely get out of the cab, and it was Emma who asked the manservant whether the doctor was still upstairs.

Stella took off her cloak mechanically and made her way to the staircase, the servants watching her with pitying faces. Up and up she climbed, straining her ears to catch the faintest sound—she half dreaded, half longed, to hear him cry. But there was no noise at all, and when Stella stopped in front of the closed nursery door, she could hear a man's voice saying someing in a low tone. Was little Richard already dead, and were they consulting together how to break it to her? There was a long silence, Stella leant against the wall, not daring to stir a step. She heard people moving downstairs, heard the big clock in the drawing room strike nine, and still no sound whatever came from the nursery. She put her hand out and laid it upon the handle, but drew it back suddenly, as she heard someone running up the stairs. It was Martin just arrived, bounding up three or four steps at a time, still in his coat and hat.

Stella came to meet him.

"Don't make a noise," she said. "The doctor is in there."

"What does he say is the matter?" asked Martin, pulling off his coat and hanging it on the banisters. He had been almost dazed a few

minutes before in the hall when, instead of Stella, Ronald Pierson had stepped on to the platform and informed the audience that Mrs. Bagehot had been unavoidably called away by the sudden illness of her child. He thought chiefly of Stella as he drove quickly home, and stopped to ask no questions of the servants. He saw now at once that Stella knew nothing.

"Haven't you been in then?" he said.

Before she could answer, the nursery door opened, and the doctor came out. He looked worried and anxious, and an expression of pain came across his face when he saw Martin and Stella. He had only met Stella once or twice before, but her great beauty had imprinted itself upon his memory, and when he noticed how wretched she looked, his heart went out to her. He took one of her hands in both his.

"You mustn't despair," he said, "although I will not pretend that it is not a most serious case." Then turning to Martin

"The child has acute inflammation of the brain, and is in a high fever. Everything depends upon the next few hours, I have given every direction to your nurse, and I have sent for another—a trained nurse. I shall come back myself toward midnight. If there should be any change, you have only to send for me." And with another pressure of the hand he was gone.

Martin was too stunned for the moment to say anything. Stella had sunk down on her knees, and buried her face in her hands. Although she had felt sure he was dying before, the doctor's words rang in her ears like a fresh knell. Martin stooped down beside her, and tried gently to lift her up.

"You mustn't despair, my darling," he whispered. "Come, let us go in."

"You go," said Stella. "I want to stay here alone just for a few minutes," and she looked up pleadingly, Martin thought she wanted to pray. He stopped beside her for a moment as he sent up his soul in an intense prayer for his child's safety, then got up, silently opened the nursery door and disappeared.

Left alone on the dim landing, Stella's fear rushed upon her again ;—she did not pray—she hardly knew what she thought of as she sat huddled against the banisters. Confused memories of the last few days crowded through her brain, she would quite forget her trouble for a second or two, as she recalled this or that incident, but the slightest creak or rustle of sound brought her mind back to its strained tension. What was going on inside? What? what? She remembered her maid's description in the cab—and the doctor. Had he not said that everything would depend upon the next two or three hours? The

thought that in a short time she would know, came across her as a relief, and then a sudden longing not to go into the room till he was out of danger possessed her. She could do nothing, and she could not bear to see his staring eyes, unless she knew he was saved. And then the horror of perhaps seeing him die!

She got up and turned as if she meant to go downstairs again and out and away. But she stopped, hearing Martin's step move toward the door. He looked very white and haggard, and he closed the door softly.

Stella said not a word, only gazed at him almost as if she were mad. Her expression frightened Martin so much that he began gently leading her downstairs. After the first few steps Stella stopped.

"Is he dead?" she asked and her voice sounded strange and husky.

"No, no, darling," answered Martin. "But he's very ill, and Rose wants help, and I think I heard the hospital nurse drive up."

And as he spoke, they could both hear a woman coming up the stairs toward them. Martin led Stella to her room and put her on her bed.

"I really think you had better not come in just yet," he whispered, bending down over her, as his voice broke into a sob. "The little fellow is quite blind, and it's so piteous!"

Then he started up, and Stella heard him take the new nurse upstairs.

She did not stay on her bed for a moment, but began pacing up and down the room till she suddenly caught sight of herself in the glass and realized with a start that she was still in her acting clothes, and still had the rouge upon her cheeks. Hardly knowing what she was doing, she tore off her dress, letting the beautiful chain tumble in a heap on the floor. She scrubbed her cheeks vehemently, and the cold water on her face seemed to revive her. She wondered what she could put on, and when she opened her cupboard, instinctively took hold of a black soft silk dressing gown which she had worn before little Richard was born. She slipped it on quickly and then opened her door and ran upstairs again.

The sense that the hospital nurse was in the room, while it lessened her fear, made it seem unnecessary that she should enter it herself; and when she got to the door, she remembered Martin's words: "quite blind." It was impossible to go in. She never knew afterward how long she stood or crouched there, only she felt herself getting colder and colder.

Martin came out to fetch something, and put his hand upon her and begged her to go downstairs. She never dared ask him how the child was, but only shook her head miserably, and tried

to see into the dimly lit room when he went back.

Another weary stretch of time passed, and Stella slowly drew nearer the door,—at last she crouched down just opposite it. Rose almost stepped upon her when she came out carrying an empty can. The old nurse, however, did not stop to speak to her, indeed hardly looked at her, and Stella felt in her soul that she was despised by Rose as well as by herself.

The time crept on and on, and Stella heard eleven, then twelve, strike, and there seemed to be absolute silence in the room. She was leaning right against the door, when suddenly through the intense stillness came a little agonizing cry of pain. In a moment Stella was erect, something from the very bottom of her heart sprang up to give her courage—all the Mother in her was alive again. She turned the handle and went in.

The room was very dimly lit, but Stella could see Richard's little cot brought into the larger day-room, and close beside it the big nursery table covered with bottles and cans and basins. There was already in the place that curious smell which always haunts sick rooms, suggestive somehow of solemn hush and calm. Martin's arms were resting on one of the sides of the cot, his head bent. Rose was sitting on a chair with little Richard on her lap, while the hospital nurse

in her white cap bent over him putting something into the child's mouth.

Everyone in the room except Richard looked round as the door opened. Stella came straight up to Rose, sat down in a low chair and held out her arms for her child. It seemed strange to no one that, without a word spoken, she should be obeyed, and little Richard was silently transferred to her lap.

Stella looked down at the child. His eyes which she could see herself were sightless, were moving restlessly, his body was stiff.

"It is a crisis which will be over in a moment," whispered the nurse, and a second later the child's body relaxed and he half closed his eyes.

"Dr. Graves ought to be here soon now," she said again.

Stella drew the child a little closer to her and bent over him—she longed to pray, but when she tried to frame some words, they seemed only to float upon the empty air. In her gay and absorbing life, she had left off her habit of constant prayer, much as she might have given up wearing a particular cloak, and now at her sorest need she felt that she could not reach God. There was little time to think, however: for something had constantly to be done, and she never took her eyes off the baby's suffering little face.

Before very long the doctor arrived. He

looked at the child, felt its pulse, and said absolutely nothing.

Stella did not dare ask, but she heard Martin say:

"What do you think doctor?" Dr. Graves shook his head.

"I haven't much hope," he said. "The fever has abated a little, but in spite of all we can do, the child is sinking," and then he turned to the nurse and asked various questions. When he got up once, Stella said with a note of agony in her voice.

"You aren't going, Dr. Graves, are you?"

"No no! Mrs. Bagehot," he answered reassuring her. "I shall not go yet.

The time crept on—every few minutes the doctor or the nurse put some restorative medicine into the baby's soft little mouth, and the doctor held one tiny hand in his. The breathing seemed to grow quieter and quieter, and at first Stella wondered if this were not a good sign, but she could see hope gradually flickering out from the faces round her.

"They may all be wrong," she said to herself, "he's sleeping so quietly."

It was beginning to turn cold, and all at once a stir seemed to come into the air. Outside, Stella could hear a bird chirping, and when she raised her eyes for a moment she saw a gray

fringe of light showing below the blind. It was the dawn—the dawn of anguish and sorrow. For at that first chill, the baby stirred. He opened his eyes for one moment.

"Look," said Stella in a whisper. "He's better."

The doctor raised his head as if to hush her, for a slight shiver passed over the child like a faint ripple across water, and then he lay absolutely still.

For a few moments Stella did not know what had happened, but the awful silence of death had fallen upon the room. No one stirred, only the chirping of the birds outside seemed to grow louder. Suddenly there was the sound of weeping, and Stella looked up to see Rose on her knees, gazing at her with the tears streaming down her face. She looked at the doctor, but he would not meet her eyes, and walked slowly to the window. Stella held out both her arms with a dumb gesture of despair, and Martin came to her at once. He took the little dead child tenderly off her knees, and laid him in the cot, Stella making no resistance, and then he gently lifted her in his arms and carried her out of the room.

CHAPTER X.

"Hush! for tears
Begin to steal to their eyes,
Hush! for fruit
Grows from such sorrow as theirs."

FOR the first hour or two Stella seemed completely dazed; she sat on the sofa in her room staring vacantly before her. But as, gradually, the sounds of life grew stronger and stronger, as the sun began to rise above the house-tops and stream into her window, she woke up to her misery. The full volume of the current of her nature, which had flowed hitherto between such pleasant flowery banks, was suddenly turned into the narrow rocky passages of grief. The violence of her feeling was terrible to see—she completely lost control, and flung her arms about, moaning all the time like a caged animal. As yet no thought of anyone but herself and her own agony had touched her, and when Martin came back into the room, he was terrified by her white and dry-eyed face. He tried by every means to calm and soothe her, but she kept throwing herself against the rail of her bed, and beating her head

against the wall, crying out all the time for her child, and imploring him to come back to her.

"If he could have talked," she said wildly, "I should not mind so much. But he can't say anything—he can't explain. I've never heard his voice. I've never heard him say Mother. What will he do all alone?"

Rose, the old nurse, who had sat upstairs quite blinded by grief, could at length keep away no longer—she heard Stella's unnatural voice, and felt that she alone—she who had nursed her and rocked her to sleep—could quiet her now. So without knocking she entered the room, and going straight up to Stella, took hold of her hands.

"Come upstairs and see our darling baby, Miss Stella. Come upstairs now," she said, and Stella obeyed her like a little child. Martin stood aside; he felt the nurse's intuition was right, and her courage almost sublime, and that these two—the nurse and the mother, were best left alone with each other.

As soon as Stella saw her child lying in his cot, exactly as if he were asleep, his little hands looking like white flowers, his face absolutely calm and happy, with the golden curls surrounding it like a halo, she burst into passionate sobs, and kneeling down, covered the tiny body with those sad unreturned kisses which yet seem to

bring a certain comfort—a sense that perhaps the escaped soul may be lingering somewhere near, and will be glad to see how much its visible shape is loved.

Rose let Stella cry and cry till her heart was tired out, then she brought her the lilies and roses and camellias which Grace, and indeed many other of Stella's friends, had already sent.

Together they pulled out of its corner the old oak cradle in which little Richard had first been rocked, and covering its mattress with a carpet of green, they laid the child down upon it. Then Stella took the flowers and placed them all round, framing the golden head with lilies and letting the lovely little feet peep out from masses of delicate blossoms. On his breast she laid one big arum lily, and put his hand upon it. It was an inexpressibly beautiful sight—the dark wooden cradle with the flowers and the human flower all resting in it together.

Rose crept downstairs to Martin, telling him she thought it would do Stella good to see him. Poor Martin—he had spent a weary time alone, mastered by his grief, as he thought of all the endearing fascinating ways of his little dead son. Should he never hear again that delighted crowing laugh, and never see those eyes light up with pleasure? He was surprised himself to find how firmly the tiny being whom he fancied played so

small a part in his existence, had taken possession of his heart—his life seemed suddenly shorn of half its import.

Grace had been to him, and held him tightly in her arms, sharing every fold of his sorrow by her intense sympathy. He told her all about Stella, how she had stayed outside the door for so many hours, how she had come in at the first cry from the baby, and how Rose had now led her back to him. The tears rushed to Grace's eyes, she longed to run upstairs and be with her sister. No one—no, not even Martin—could understand exactly as she could, or could realize how tremendous must be the force of Stella's agony—after the defeat of all her revolt against suffering. "Poor child! poor child!" she kept on saying, but she did not ask to go to her, feeling again that she must not force her way in, though sure in her heart that the first moment Stella saw her, they would be close together once more.

Her visit comforted Martin and he went upstairs at Rose's summons, prepared to turn every thought and feeling upon his wife.

But when he entered the room, at the first sight of the little pathetic body—so touching in its utter helplessness even when full of life, and doubly so now when no care, however loving, could reach it again—he broke down completely,

and burying his face in the pillow of the now empty cot, sobbed like a little child himself.

And for Stella's sake he could have done nothing wiser—she appreciated suddenly and fully another human being's grief, and poured out her soul in sympathy.

"We shall see him again! We shall see him again!" she kept on saying. "I know we shall, and God will give us another son to play with here."

Gradually as they both grew calmer, they sat together hand in hand almost silent, but feeling that wonderful closeness of spirit which is the reward of all great sorrow fully shared. Stella's past life, with its gay thoughtlessness, seemed to her now like a dream, and she realized with no shrinking and no rebellion, that all was changed for her, and that a new life had begun.

CHAPTER XI.

" And like the hand which ends a dream
Death with the might of his sunbeam
Touches the flesh and the soul awakes.

ON a beautiful sunny day, Stella's baby was buried in the little churchyard on the top of St. Martha's Hill, and his place had been chosen by Stella herself. She felt instinctively that here where the great joy of her life had been given to her, here she would also plant her sorrow.

She came down to Leyton the day before, and wandered about the house with her father, asking every sort of question about Fräulein, and going into the poor governess' room with a contraction at her heart, but a sense somehow that her old friend must have understood. She knelt beside her bed, and felt as if once more she could speak to her.

"Look after him for me!" she said. "Don't let him forget me! Love him always!"

Lady Hambledon had been with her too, and Stella cried bitterly when she saw her, and kept

on kissing her over and over again, almost as if she wanted more to comfort than to be comforted.

Grace alone she had not seen, though she longed for her unspeakably. But Grace kept away, for she knew Stella would send for her at her own time. It had been arranged that she and Rose were to bring the coffin down and drive straight to the foot of St. Martha's Hill, where Martin and two or three men would meet them and carry the little burden up to the church. All the way down in the train, Grace was wondering when and how she should first see Stella. Her whole heart went out to her, and there scarcely seemed room in her thoughts for anything but love. With that intuition which belongs to noble natures, she never for one instant doubted how Stella would greet her, and only remembered their last meeting with a blessed sense of contrast. Of all those who loved her, Grace was perhaps the only one fully conscious of the significance of this event in Stella's life—the only one who understood the extent of her suffering. It meant not merely the loss of her child, but the flooding in upon her consciousness of all the sorrow round her. That joyous confidence and thoughtlessness would be gone forever, but in its stead would be a wider vision, and a new power of sympathy—

the full rich nature, so passionate, so self-willed, had been not tamed, but taught—not crushed but deepened. And in the future, Grace could fancy new and more lasting joys.

Martin and two or three men on the Leyton estate who had known Stella since she was a child, met Grace and Rose at the foot of the hill.

"I persuaded Stella to wait at the top," said Martin, "she is very weak," and then he and the others started on their slow climb. Grace walked behind, marveling at the fate which had ordained that she should not see Stella until they both stood beside the grave. Her mind at first was full of thoughts about her sister, but gradually as they got nearer the top of the hill, she drew closer in spirit to the mystery of Death, and realized with a strange awe that no human feeling stood between her now and her vision of Christ and God. She scarcely looked up as they all entered the little church, so absorbed was she in this communion.

Stella kneeling with her face in her hands, never raised her head. All through her trouble, she had prayed mechanically, but never with any sense of being heard. And now in this little church associated with every deep feeling of her life, where she had so often prayed and felt herself with a kind of joyful rapture in the presence

of God, her faith came back to her. Christ was in her heart, and the horror of the loneliness of her child was suddenly taken from her.

The words which must so often strike upon a mourner's heart with a bitter irony: "Death is swallowed up in victory; O Death where is thy sting? O Grave where is thy victory? The sting of Death is sin. . ." came to her ears like the sound of a trumpet.

"He had no sin, no sin," she said to herself again and again, almost with triumph.

When the little coffin was in the grave, Stella looking down could see nothing but white flowers clothing the ground.

"Man that is born of woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay."

When the first piece of earth was dropped into the grave, she turned away. Grace was standing just behind her, and Stella held out her arms to her as if nothing had ever come between them, letting her head rest on Grace's shoulder as she gave way to a passion of sorrow over this last eternal farewell.

"Clasp your sorrow close, close to you," whispered Grace, and Stella tightened her hold as if she understood. Martin drew nearer to her, and

Stella and Grace looked up. It was a solemn moment. Death was there and Birth also: for Stella felt dimly that a new soul had come to her, and to those who stood about her its radiance was visible in her face.

THE END.

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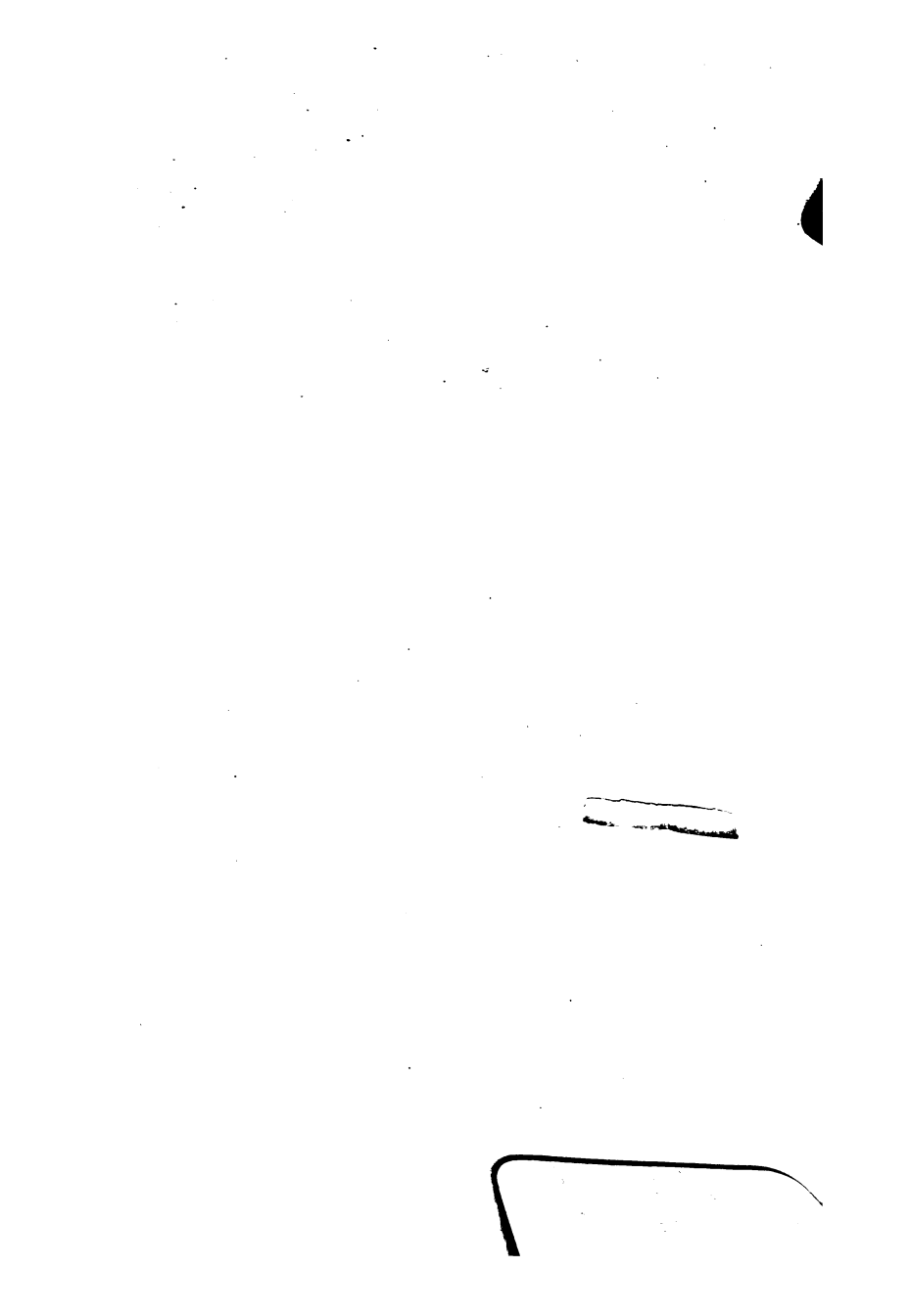
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